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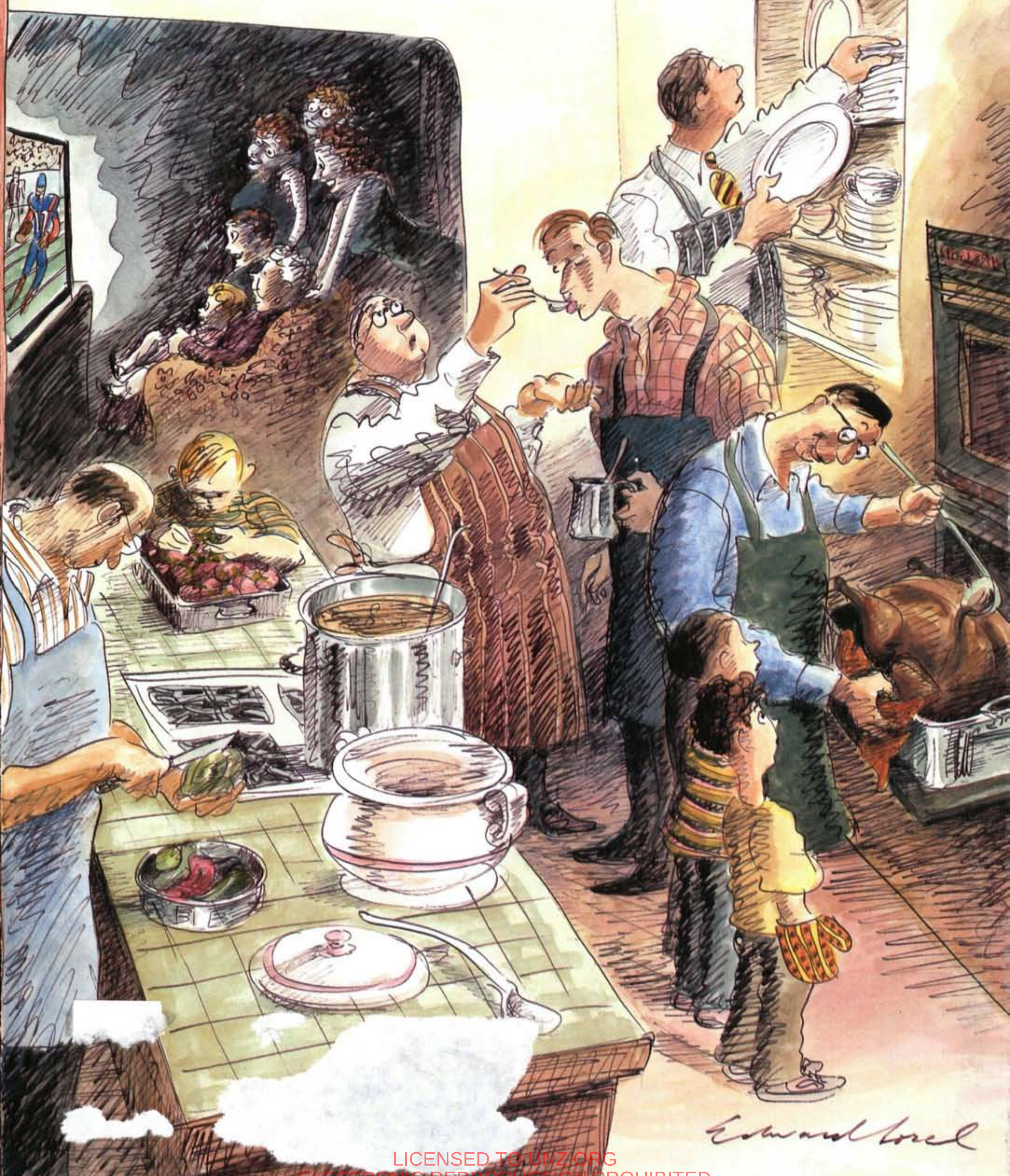
# THE NEW YORKER

DEC. 1, 2003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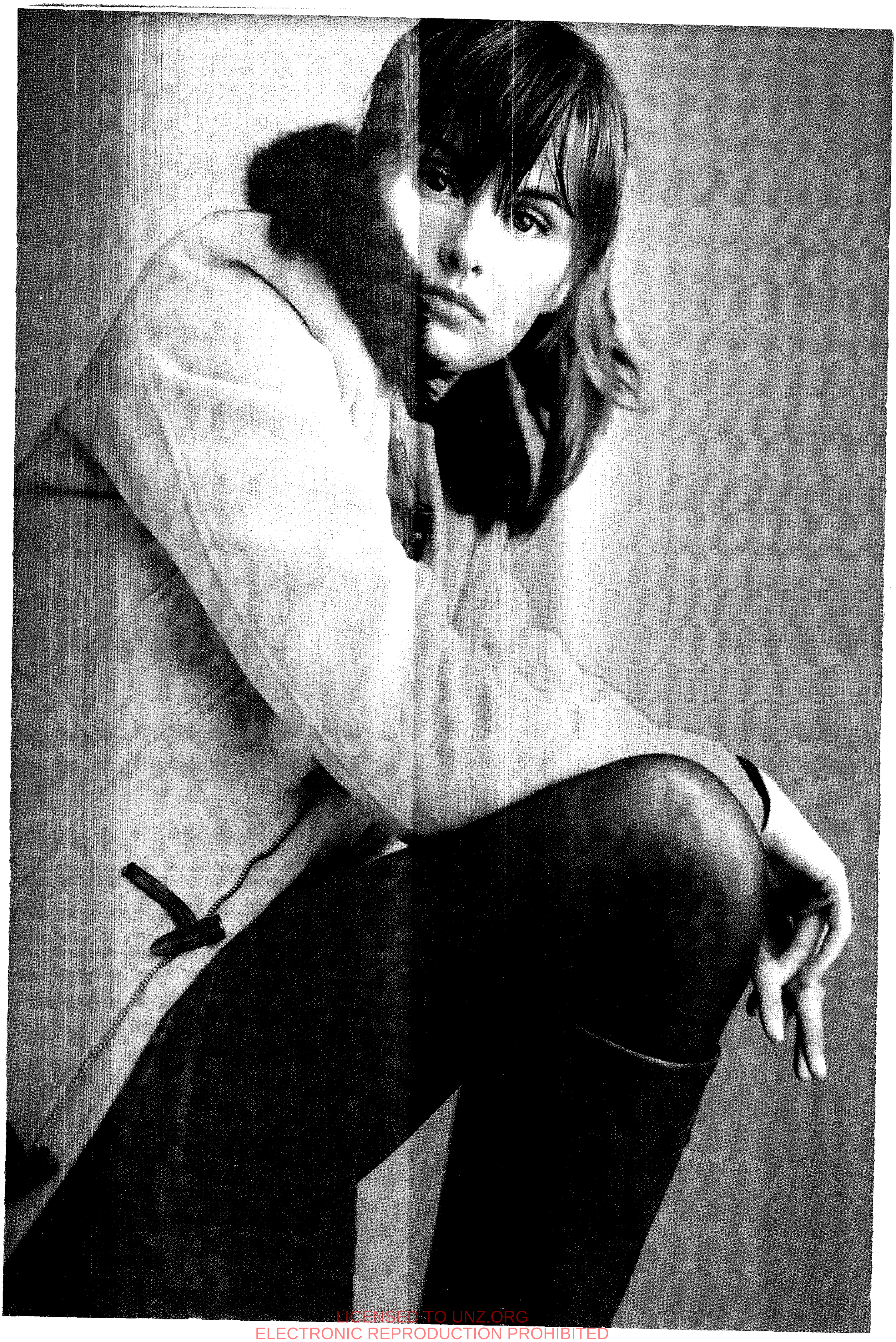

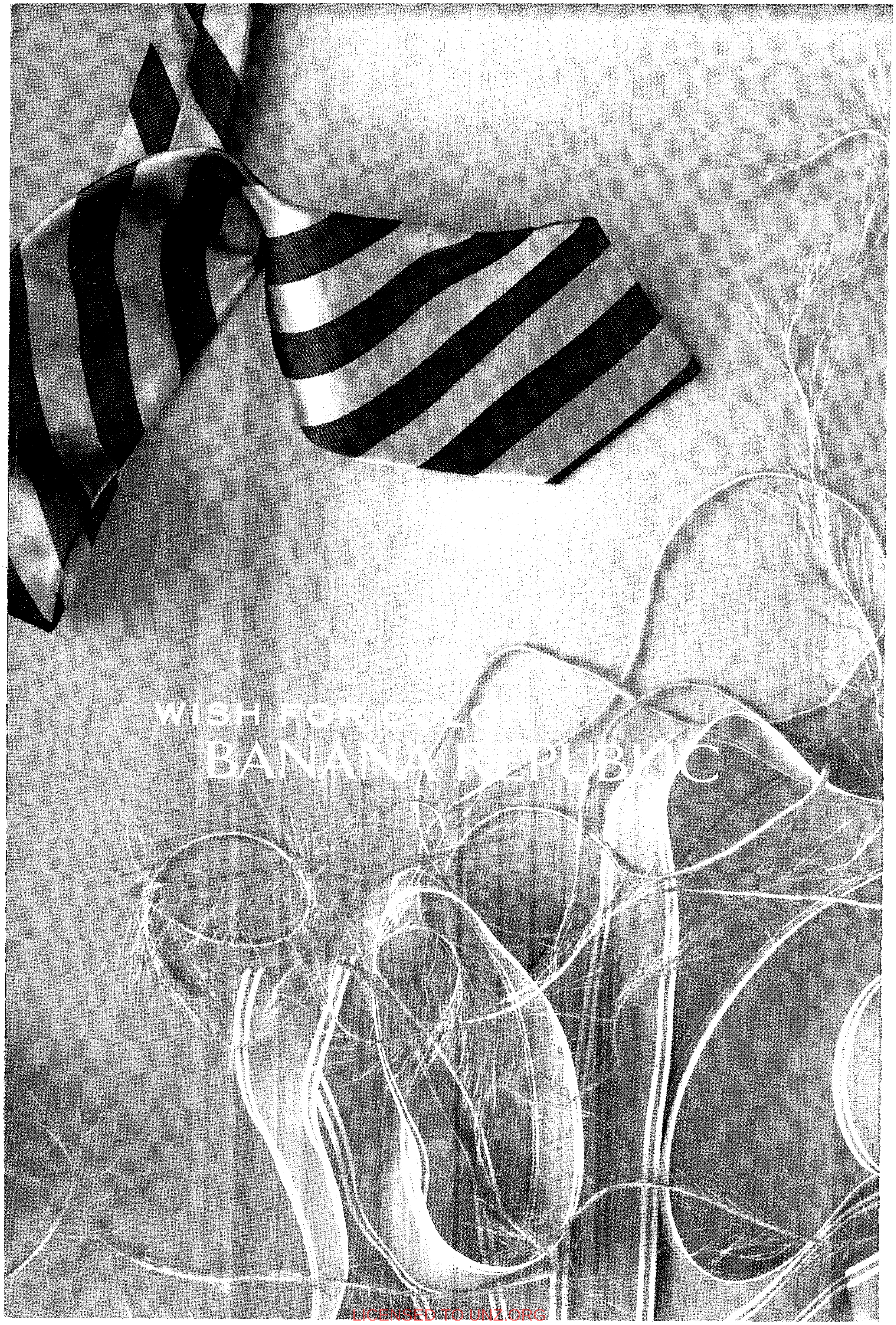
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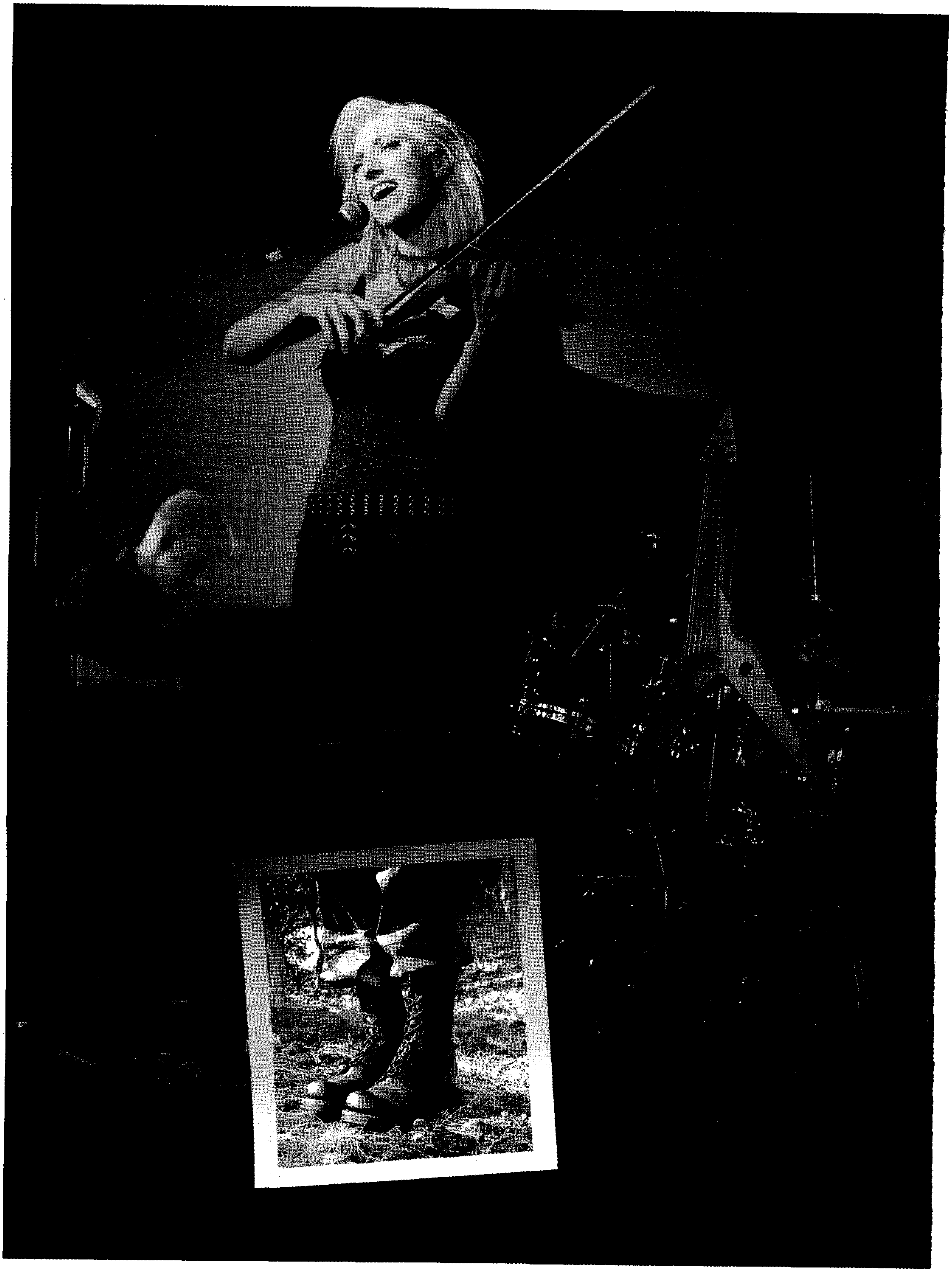

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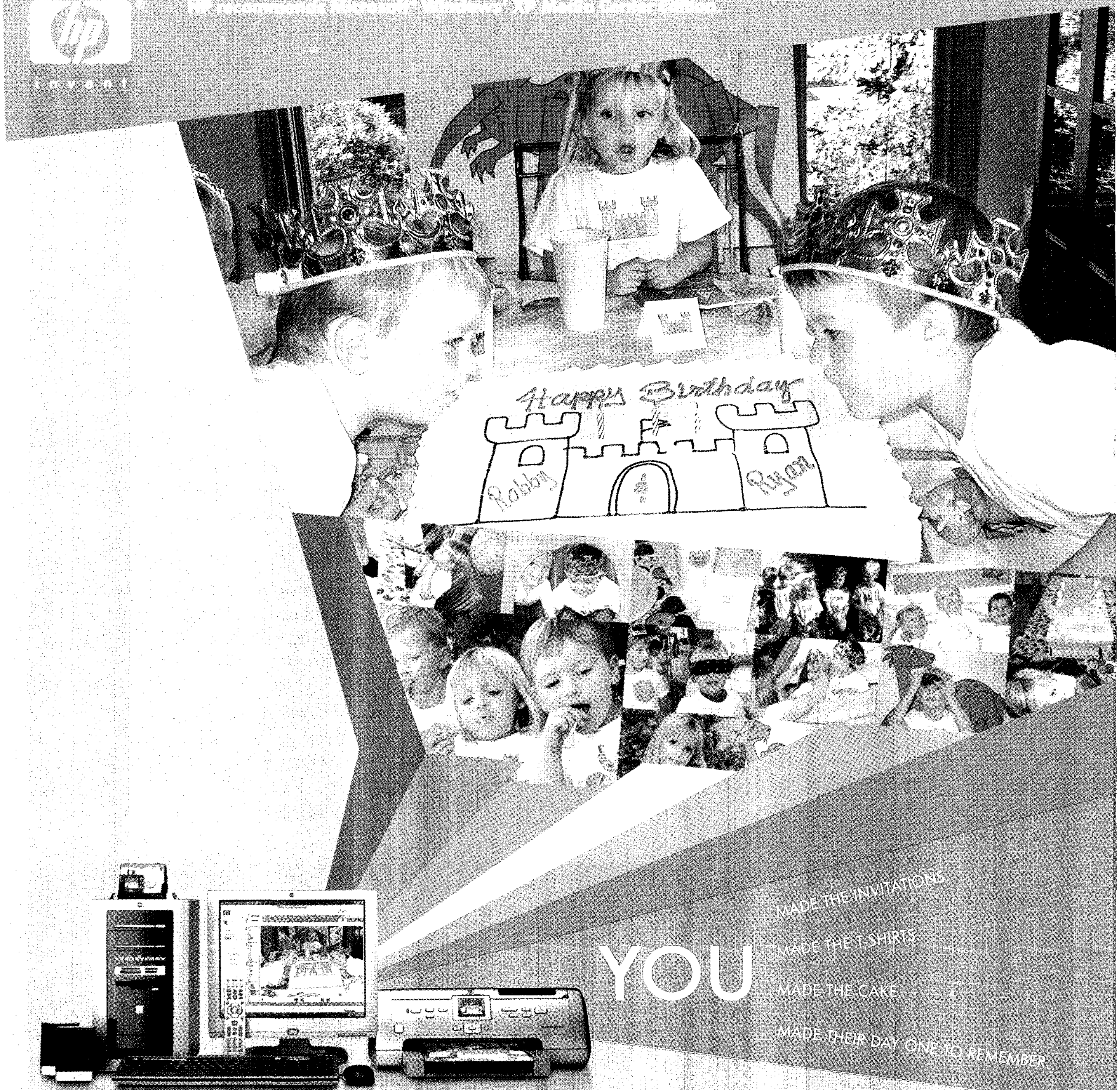
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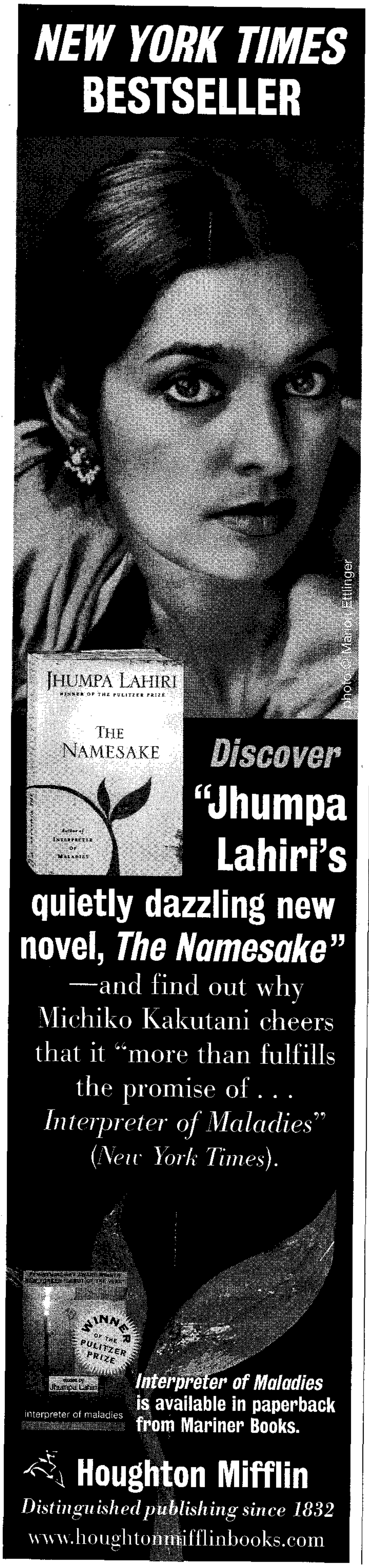

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# CONTRIBUTORS

Susan Sheehan ("The Autism Fight," p. 76), a staff writer since 1961, received the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction for her book "Is There No Place on Earth for Me?"

Malcolm Gladwell (Comment, p. 35) is the author of "The Tipping Point."

Nick Paumgarten ("The Noises," p. 44) is an editor at the magazine.

James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 42) writes a regular column on business and finance.

John Seabrook ("It Came from Hollywood," p. 54) is the author of "Deeper" and "Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing—The Marketing of Culture."

Vijay Seshadri (Poem, p. 68) is the recipient of the 2003 James Laughlin Award for his second collection of poems, "The Long Meadow," which will be published next spring.

Edward Sorel (Cover) has contributed more than forty covers since 1992.

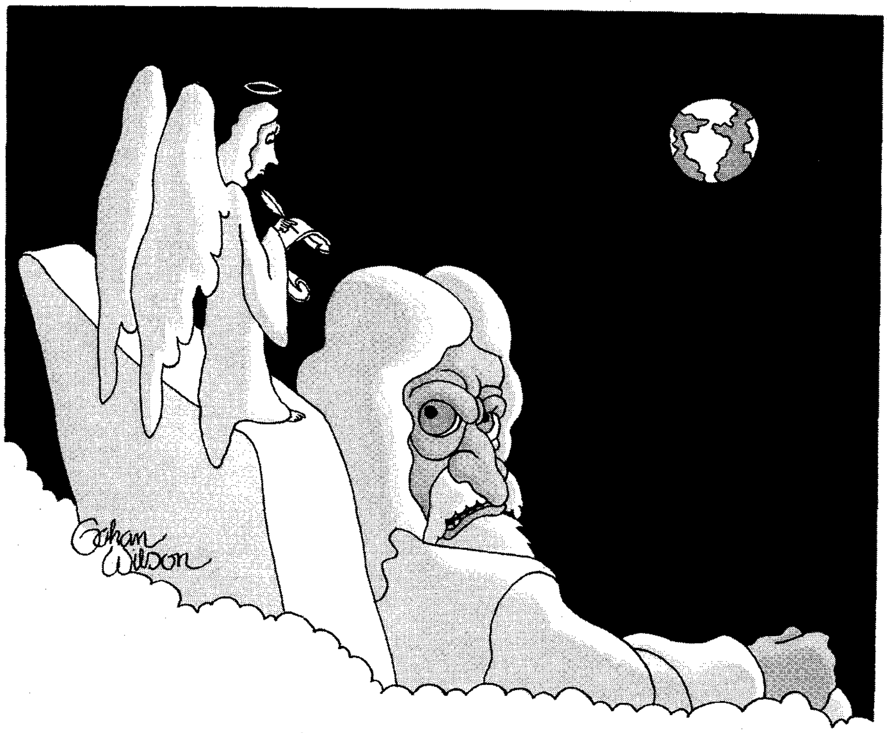
Peter Hessler ("Home and Away," p. 64) lives in Beijing. His book "River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze," about his experience as a Peace Corps teacher in China, is available in paperback.

Bruce McCall (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 52) has just published a new humor collection, "All Meat Looks Like South America."

Tessa Hadley (Fiction, p. 88) is the author of "Henry James and the Imagination of Pleasure," and of two novels, "Accidents in the Home" and "Everything Will Be All Right," which came out in October.

Louis Menand (A Critic at Large, p. 104) is a professor of English at Harvard. His most recent book, "American Studies," has just been issued in paperback.

Ralph Steadman (The Back Page, p. 122) is a writer and illustrator. His illustrations are featured in new editions of "Alice in Wonderland," which was published in July, and "The Devil's Dictionary," which comes out in January. ♦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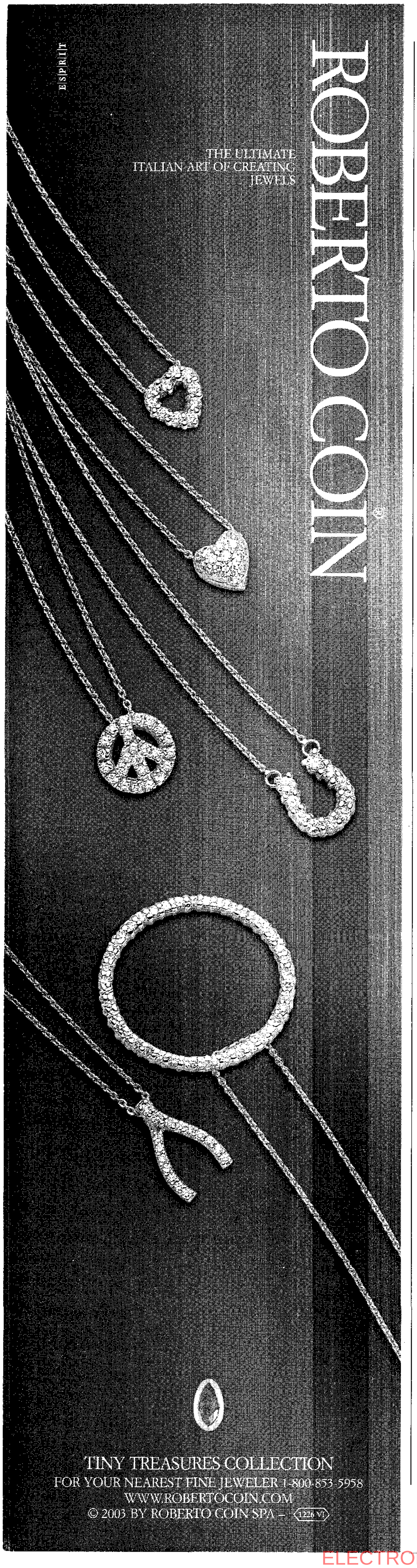

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# THE MAIL

## REEVE AND THE DOCTORS

The determined advocacy of patients like Christopher Reeve is, as Jerome Groopman writes, transforming biomedical research—for better and for worse ("The Reeve Effect," November 10th). Advocates can make research more responsive to patients' needs. But patients and the research enterprise are put at risk by rhetoric that oversimplifies the difficulties scientists face in attempting to understand human biology and intervene in such a complex system. Science advances slowly and incrementally; many promising leads end in disappointment. Patients are owed an accurate picture of the state of medical research, as are those asked to pay for that research. When advocates promote the idea that cures are imminent, they set the stage not only for dashed hopes but also for reduced science funding from disaffected officials and donors.

*Rebecca Dresser*
*Professor of Ethics in Medicine*
*Washington University*
*St. Louis, Mo.*

Reeve complains to Groopman of the careerism and risk aversion of scientists. Many of us would love to be more adventuresome, but the pressures against making leaps in research are daunting: calls for accountability, targeted programs, the substantial number of "can't lose," low-risk proposals, doubtful reviewers of proposals and the glacial pace of review, and the inability to challenge misguided or inaccurate evaluations. As fields mature, moving into new areas can be difficult. It's not so much a problem of insiders defending their turf as a lack of preliminary data or a string of relevant publications to establish credibility in the new field to get proposals funded. Reeve's decision, which he mentioned to Groopman, to take funding away from someone who he felt was too focussed on basic science is emblematic of the problem: people tend to fund approaches and viewpoints they agree with, ignoring the interconnectedness of the many paths to understanding the world and curing its ills.

*Alexander Scheeline*
*Professor of Chemistry*
*University of Illinois*
*Urbana, Ill.*

## ELECTIONS, ITALIAN STYLE

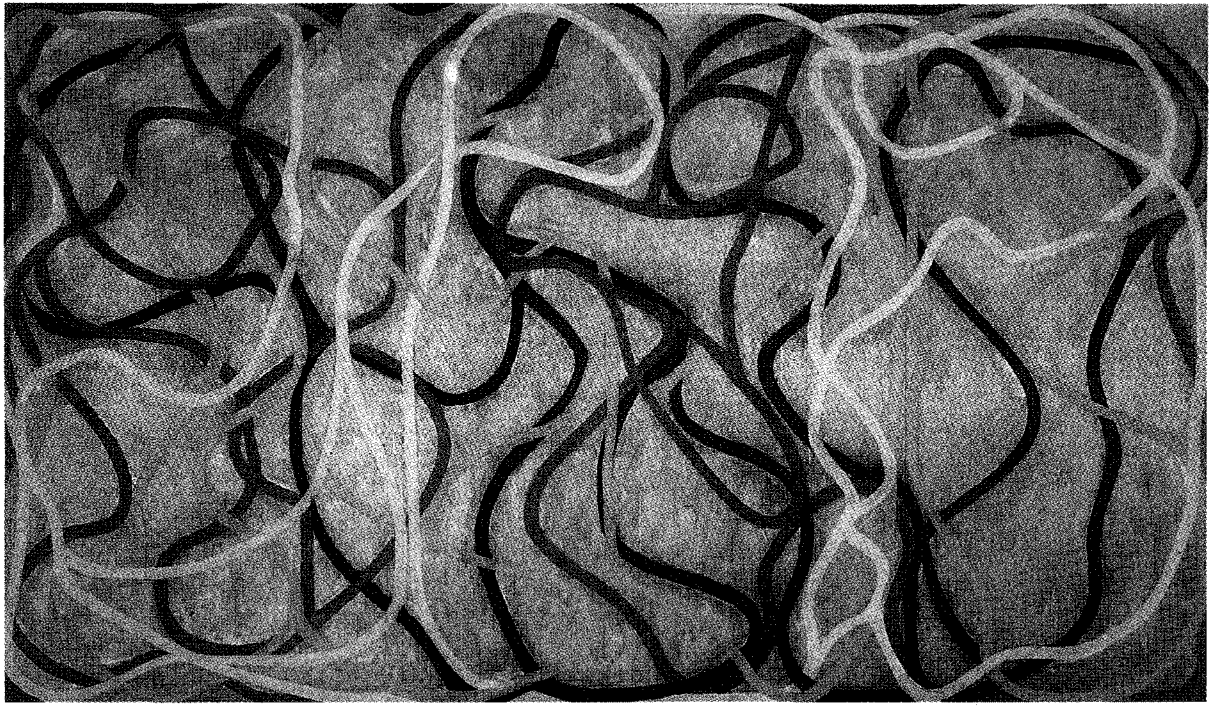
Jane Kramer, in her article on Italy's Prime Minister, concludes that "a dream called 'Silvio Berlusconi' sells better in Italy than anywhere *outside* Italy" ("All He Surveys," November 10th). But resounding electoral victories, such as Berlusconi's in 1994 and 2001, cannot be explained simply by the ability of a flashy media magnate to cunningly steer a populace of easily impressed fools. Berlusconi's success has less to do with his persona than with the policies and the strategies of the coalition he leads. Rightly or wrongly, a significant majority of Italian voters continue to believe that his coalition is the only one capable of accomplishing badly needed structural reform: reëngineering the welfare state and its bureaucracy, fostering Federalism, implementing tax reform, getting illegal immigration under control, and cracking down on petty crime. The same majority of voters perceive the opposition, inexorably split into a myriad of bickering factions, as unwilling to pursue these objectives and as otherwise inept, if not plainly hypocritical. The Berlusconi phenomenon is undoubtedly fascinating and at times bizarre. But by overlooking the political context in which it has developed, articles like Kramer's allow the gap between the opinions on this phenomenon held within Italy and those outside it to persist, if not widen.

*Massimo Galli*
*Counsel, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development*
*London, England*

•

*Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.*

Brice Marden, Chinese Dancing, 1994–1996, Oil on canvas. The UBS Art Collection. ©2003 Brice Marden / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



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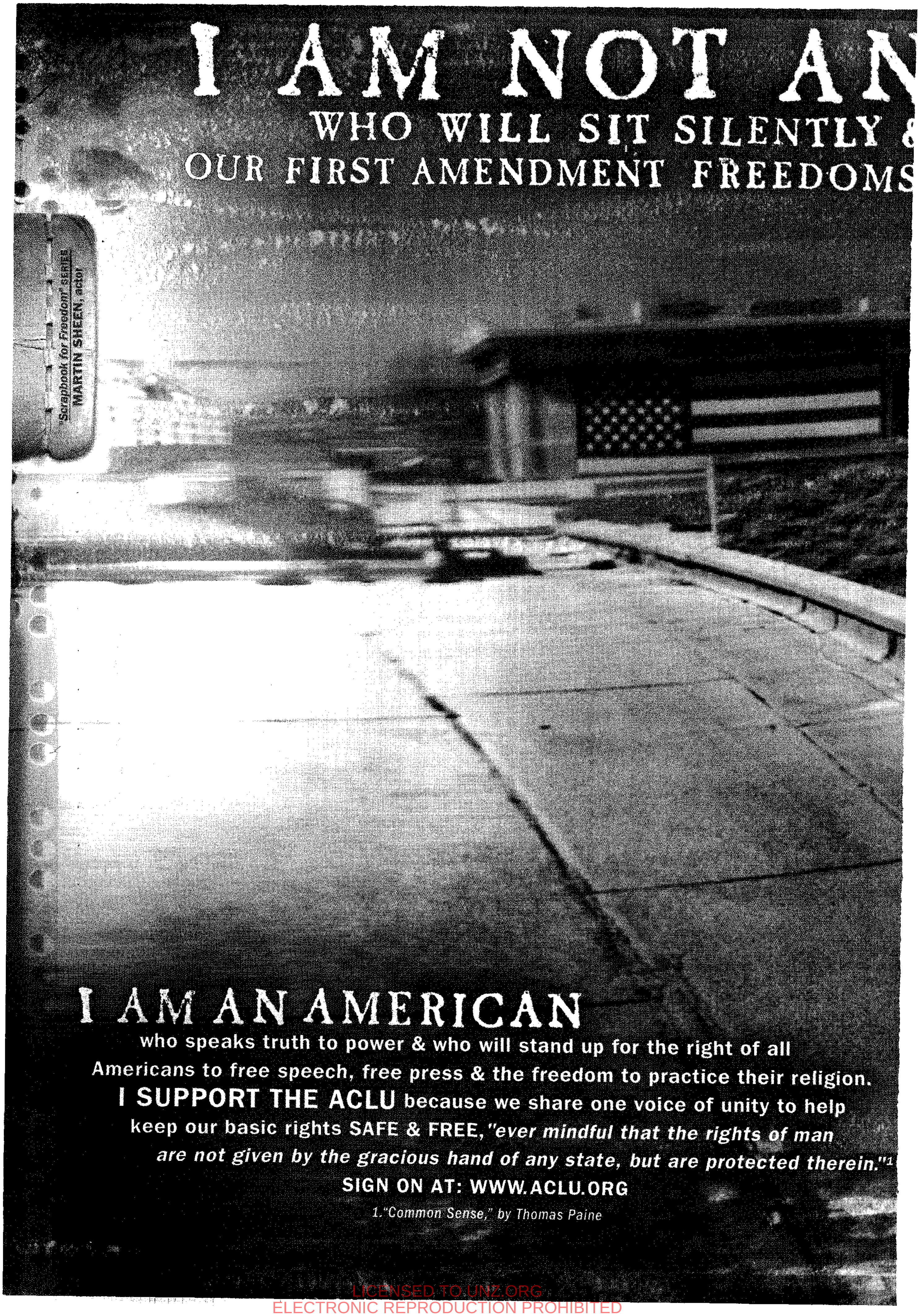
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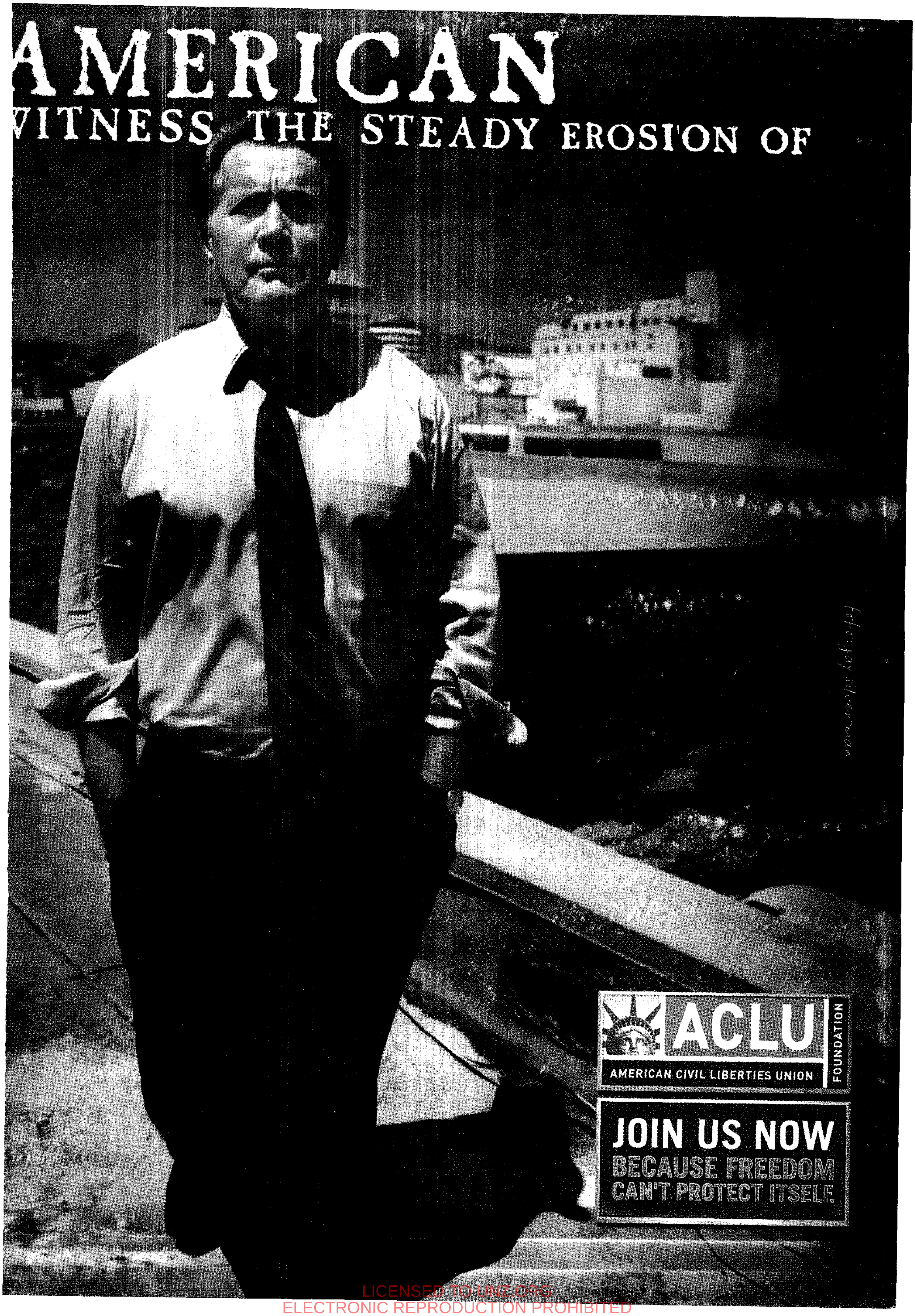
[1] *"Common Sense," by Thomas Paine*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# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

## THE THEATRE
## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

*Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.*

**ALLADEEN**
The Builders Association and London's Motiroti present an updated version of the Aladdin tale, set amid Bangalore's telemarketing industry. Directed by Marianne Weems, with lighting by Jennifer Tipton. Opens Dec. 2 at 7:30. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

**BIRDY**
A new play by Naomi Wallace, adapted from the novel by William Wharton, is directed by Lisa Peterson. In previews. Opens Dec. 2 at 7. (Women's Project, 424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

**BROADWAY SINGS THE ODD POTATO**
Frank Gorshin, Molly Ephraim, B. J. Crosby, and Charlotte Rae lead the cast in a Hanukkah musical by Eileen Bluestone Sherman (book and lyrics) and Gail C. Bluestone (music). Directed by Randy Skinner. Nov. 24-30. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400.)

**CAROLINE, OR CHANGE**
Tony Kushner's new musical, with music by Jeanine Tesori, is set in Louisiana in 1963 and tells the story of the friendship between a black maid and the son of the Jewish family she works for. Directed by George C. Wolfe. In previews. Opens Nov. 30 at 8. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-239-6200.)

**DINNER WITH DEMONS**
Second Stage presents a garrulous feast by the journalist, food writer, and playwright Jonathan Reynolds, who regales the audience with stories while preparing an opulent meal. In previews. (307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

**DUET**
A new play about the rivalry between the actresses Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse stars Pamela Payton-Wright and Laura Esterman. Directed by Ludovica Villar-Hauser. In previews. (Greenwich Street Theatre, 547 Greenwich St. 212-352-3101.)

**FRAME 312**
In Keith Reddin's play, which stars Mary Beth Peil and Larry Bryggman, a Time-Life secretary keeps a secret about John F. Kennedy's assassination. Directed by Karen Kohlhaas. Previews begin Nov. 26. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

**I AM MY OWN WIFE**
Doug Wright's one-man play about a real-life German transvestite who survived the Nazis and the Communists—with all parts brilliantly played by Jefferson Mays—jumps to Broadway after a successful Off Broadway run. Directed by Moisés Kaufman. In previews. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

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**JUVENILIA**
A campus-seduction comedy by Wendy MacLeod ("The House of Yes") comes to Playwrights Horizons in a production directed by David Petrarca. In previews. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

**NEVER GONNA DANCE**
A new musical based on the Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers vehicle "Swing Time," featuring the music of Jerome Kern. Directed by Michael Greif. In previews. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

**NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH**
A new play by John Kani, set in South Africa in the postapartheid era, centers on the emotions of a black South African man whose brother has died in exile. Directed by Janice Honeyman. In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

**RIGHT YOU ARE**
The National Actors Theatre presents a play by Luigi Pirandello, about people who pry into the private lives of newcomers to their community, in a translation by Eric Bentley. Directed by Fabrizio Melano. In previews. (Schimmel Center for the Arts at Pace University, Spruce St. between Park Row and Gold St. 212-239-6200.)

**ROSE'S DILEMMA**
Mary Tyler Moore stars in a Manhattan Theatre Club production of a new play by Neil Simon, about a famous writer who resolves to write a blockbuster. Directed by Lynne Meadow. In previews. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

**A VERY MERRY UNAUTHORIZED CHILDREN'S SCIENTOLOGY PAGEANT**
The irreverent theatrical group Les Frères Corbusier presents a musical production about the history of Scientology, performed by children, with text and music by Kyle Jarrow. Directed by Alex Timbers. In previews. (The Tank, 432 W. 42nd St. 212-868-4444.)

## OPENED RECENTLY

**ANNA IN THE TROPICS**
Nilo Cruz's Pulitzer Prize-winning play about a man who reads Tolstoy to workers in a Cuban cigar factory stars Jimmy Smits and Daphne Rubin-Vega. Directed by Emily Mann. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**THE BEARD OF AVON**
Amy Freed's new comedy proposes an unusual solution to the controversy over Shakespearean authorship: that the Earl of Oxford, Edward De Vere, collaborated on plays with the unschooled but talented Will Shakspere and relied on him more and more as time went on. Tim Blake Nelson's Shakspere evolves during the play from a sweetly yearning farmer to a writer sure of his craft, but it's Mark Harelik's convincing portrayal of De Vere that elevates the play beyond farce. Mary Louise Wilson, as Queen Elizabeth, and Tom Lacy, in several roles, are standouts. Directed by Doug Hughes. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

**THE BOY FROM OZ**
The charming, wildly hardworking performer Hugh Jackman has been put in the awkward position of having to prove that the Australian singer-songwriter Peter Allen—who was discovered by Judy Garland and who married her daughter Liza Minnelli—is worthy of our attention. Just this side of overly hunky, Jackman does everything he can to sell the show, and the girls in the audience love him. But he is undermined by the production that swirls around him. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/27/03.) (Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**BRIGHT IDEAS**
The first act is a tour de force, and even if the second act turns into a tour de too much force, Eric Coble's farce about parents who will stop at nothing to get their son into a choice preschool has physical and verbal comedy to spare. Seana Kofoed is the demented mother, Paul Fitzgerald is her compliant husband, and Orlagh Cassidy, Linda Marie Larson, and Colman Domingo shine in multiple roles. Directed by John Rando. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-279-4200. Closes Dec. 7.)

**THE CARETAKER**
No other contemporary playwright has explored the nasty ways in which fathers and sons construct each other—and then smash the models—with as much vibrancy and perspicacity as Harold Pinter. In "The Caretaker," his breakthrough play from 1960, two brothers—Aston, who is slow and deliberate, and Mick, a presentable sociopath—allow an old drifter named Davies to stay in their house, tacitly inviting him to mend their cracked minds and howling hearts, as if he were the father they'd been waiting for all their lives. In the Roundabout's production, Patrick Stewart, as Davies, and Kyle MacLachlan, as Aston, perform well under David Jones's sensitive direction; Aidan Gillen, as Mick, is both lethal and ador-

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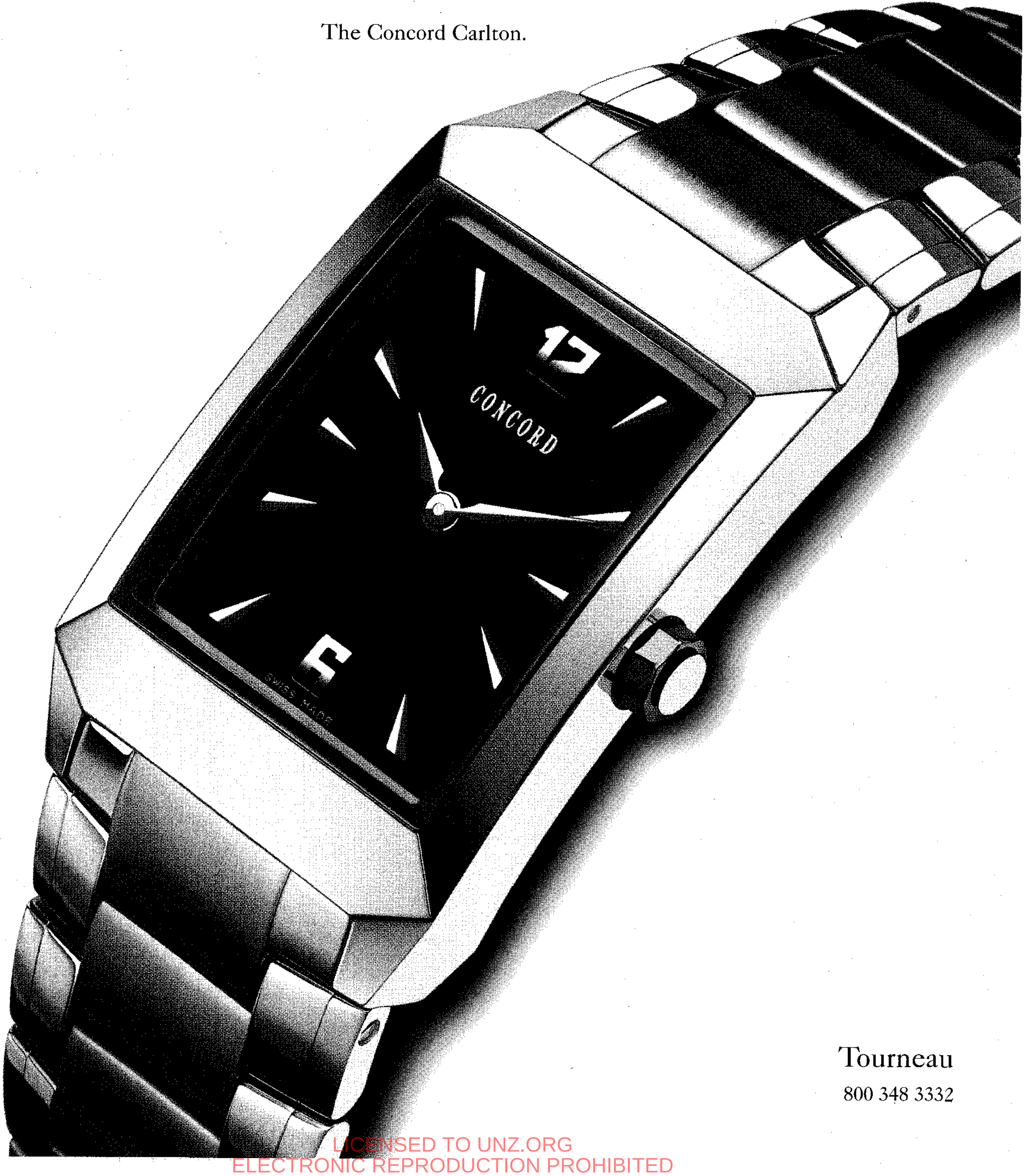

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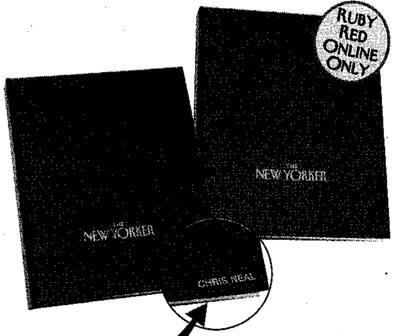

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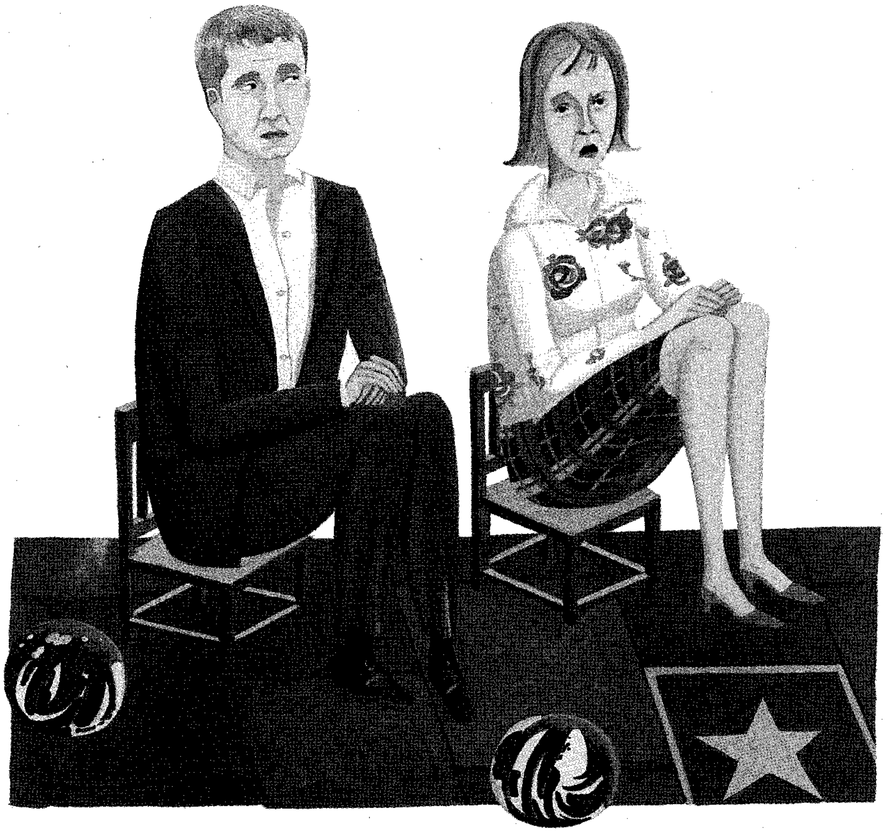


*Paul Fitzgerald and Seana Kofoed in Eric Coble's preschool satire, "Bright Ideas."*

able, a cuddly gutter rat. (11/17/03) (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

**CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF**
The linchpin of this superb revival of Tennessee Williams's mid-fifties masterpiece is Ned Beatty, who plays Big Daddy Pollitt, the owner of "twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile." Beatty is a dangerous actor, and he catches all of Big Daddy's cunning and cruelty. Ashley Judd, as Maggie the Cat, and Jason Patric, as her husband, Big Daddy's son Brick, are worthy opponents. Judd brings movie-star beauty and steeliness to the role—and, beneath her ladylike veneer, a brave heart. Directed by Anthony Page. (11/10/03) (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**THE COOK**
Eduardo Machado's new play starts in the kitchen of a Havana mansion on New Year's Eve, 1958, where the cook, Gladys (Zabryna Guevara), is preparing dessert for her mistress's holiday party. At midnight, as news of Fidel Castro's takeover of Cuba arrives, her employer flees the country, charging Gladys to protect the house in her absence. As forty years elapse, Machado shows how Gladys evolves through political, social, and personal changes. Antje Ellerman's set is so convincing that you're tempted to sneak onto the stage and taste the food, which Guevara cooks while acting. The director, Michael John Garcés, whets the appetite by sending the cast into the audience with appetizers before the play begins. José Conde's original Cuban-roots score completes the mood. (Intar 53, at 508 W. 53rd St. 212-279-4200.)

**DOLLHOUSE**
French absurdism meets American vaudeville in Lee Breuer's provocative adaptation, produced by Mabou Mines, of Ibsen's 1879 classic, "A Doll's House." Nora, a housewife (Maude Mitchell), flits among petite furnishings while chirping in falsetto; Torvald, her husband (Mark Povinelli), booms and stomps while worrying about the bank. She's *five foot eleven; he's under four feet, as are all but* one of the men in the cast. But nothing in this madcap production comes up short. Music by Eve Beglarian. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Dumbo, Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

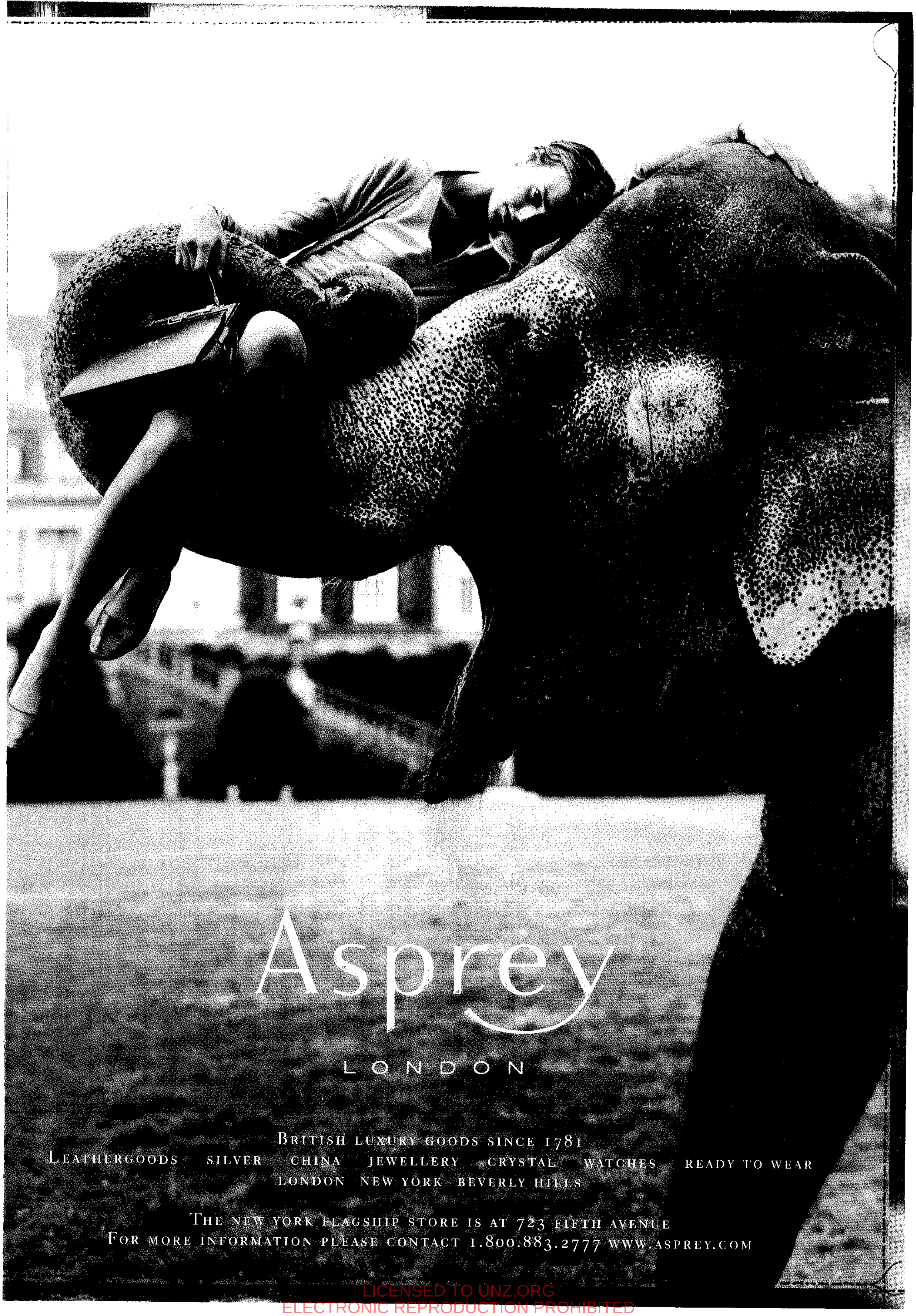
**FAME ON 42ND STREET**
The (fictional) story of the last graduating class to occupy the decrepit building near Theatre Row that until 1984 housed New York's High School of Performing Arts. Though the show was created by David De Silva, who has been working on some version of "Fame" for more than twenty years—he produced Alan Parker's 1980 film on the subject—it is, alas, alternately sentimental, exploitative, and ugly. The lyrics (by Jacques Levy) and the music (by Steve Margoshes) are passable, but José Fernandez's book is as lacking in nutrients as a chocolate box full of dust. The only performer who survives this mess with her dignity intact is Sara Schmidt, as a shy Jewish girl with a big voice. If she can keep it up, she should win the Ethel Merman Stamina Award. (11/24/03) (Little Shubert, 422 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

**HENRY IV**
An adaptation by Dakin Matthews of Shakespeare's history play combines Part I and Part II into a performance that lasts under four hours. With Kevin Kline as Falstaff, Michael Hayden as Prince Hal, Audra McDonald as Lady Percy, Dana Ivey as Mistress Quickly, and Ethan Hawke as Hotspur. Directed by Jack O'Brien. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

**IRON**
In Rona Munro's strong new play, a young woman visits her mother, imprisoned for killing her father, after an absence of fifteen years. Munro's crystal-clear writing reveals the universal in the specific without ever seeming obvious. A powerhouse performance by Lisa Emery, as the mother, propels the drama. Directed by Anna D. Shapiro. (Manhattan Theatre Club, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

**JACKIE MASON'S LAUGHING ROOM ONLY**
He's back. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-7171.)

**THE LADY NEXT DOOR**
In the Folksbiene's spirited revival of a comedy from 1915 by Leon Kobrin, a love triangle between Eastern European immigrants turns a tenement into a Yiddish Melrose Place. With English



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supertitles. Directed by Allen Lewis Rickman. (Folksbiene Yiddish Theatre, J.C.C., 334 Amsterdam Ave. 212-239-6200.)

**LISTEN TO MY HEART**
An unabashedly sentimental musical review by the composer and lyricist David Friedman, who has written music for Kathie Lee Gifford and Barry Manilow. Friedman's melodies play upon the emotions as lightly as a sledgehammer upon an anvil. But the cast of Broadway veterans endow the songs with a healthy dose of humor, as when Anne Runolfsson and Michael Hunsaker crawl all over the piano (and each other) in the operatic love ballad "Two Different Worlds." Directed by Mark Waldrop. (Upstairs at Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-445-0190.)

**THE LONG CHRISTMAS RIDE HOME**
Paula Vogel's affecting play begins with three siblings on a fateful Christmas and flashes forward to the consequences the day has for them as adults. The production is enhanced by Basil Twist's Bunraku puppets, which represent the siblings as children. Directed by Mark Brokaw. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303. Closes Dec. 7.)

**THE MACGUFFIN?**
This serial cloak-and-dagger screwball comedy plays every Monday at the Bowery Poetry Club through mid-December. Written by Jason Rhyne and Terry Withers. Withers and his sister, Brenda Withers ("Matt & Ben"), lead the cast. Directed by Adam Gerdts. (Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery, near Bleecker St. 212-713-5446.)

**THE MERCHANT OF VENICE**
Shakespeare's exploration of xenophobia in a Venetian court plays at the Pearl, in repertory with a buoyant staging of Sheridan's comedy "The Rivals." Dominic Cuskern's Shylock is wry and agonized, but, alas, Celeste Ciulla makes Portia's orchestration of his demise seem more sophomoric than crafty. Directed by Shepard Sobel. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

**NOBODY DON'T LIKE YOGI**
In this one-man play starring Ben Gazzara, Yogi Berra, the beloved Yankee catcher and quipster, returns to Yankee Stadium after a fourteen-year feud with the Boss. Thomas Lysaght's script serves up plenty of famous Yogi-isms ("You can observe a lot by watching"), and Gazzara has Yogi down, from his head-scratching wit to his pigeon-toed gait. Directed by Paul Linke. (Lamb's Theatre, 130 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. Closes Nov. 30.)

**OMNIUM GATHERUM**
The intention of Theresa Rebeck and Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros's witty, pugnacious play, which opens to the sound of a low-flying chopper and the sight of a sumptuous Manhattan dinner party, is to punch the lights out of every intellectual pose. Under the confident and precocious direction of Will Frears, "Omnium Gatherum" is full of polemicists, but it is not itself a polemic. It is, more accurately, a provocation—a show of theatrical fireworks to enlighten our darkness. (10/6/03) (Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave. 212-239-6200. Closes Nov. 30.)

**THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW**
Resignation has settled over the union of an English couple, Edward (John Lithgow), a high-school history teacher, and Alice (Eileen Atkins), in William Nicholson's powerful evocation of a dying marriage. As Lithgow plays him, Edward is a big, passive man with a small, dithering voice; he hides behind his books, his silences, and his vagueness. Alice, cunningly shaded by Atkins's keen intelligence and sense of humor, is both an appealingly batty woman and an emotional terrorist. We are told that Napoleon took four hundred and fifty thousand men into Russia and that only twenty thousand of them survived. Edward and Alice's reserved son Jamie (Ben Chaplin) may not be one of the survivors in the family battle. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. (11/3/03) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**SEXAHOLIX: A LOVE STORY**
John Leguizamo returns to Broadway with an update of his comic one-man show. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

**TABOO**
The British singer Boy George conceived and wrote the songs for this musical about the London

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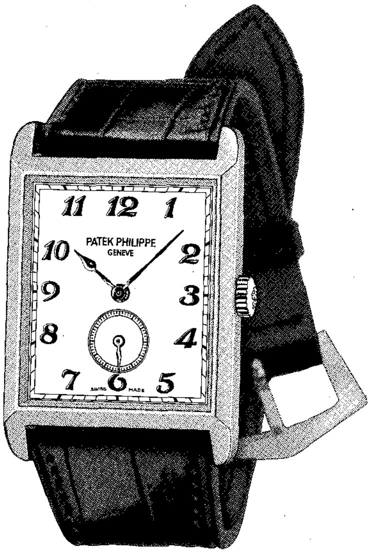

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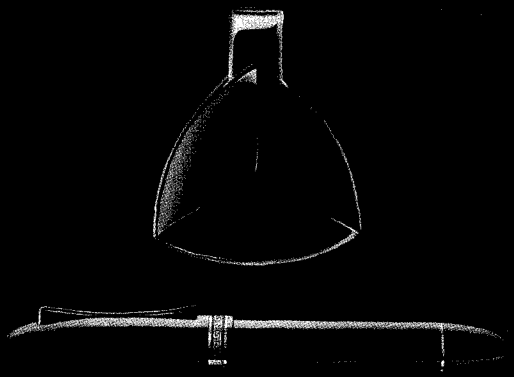

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club scene in the eighties, and one can hear how his songwriting talent has deepened since he was in the pop group Culture Club. It's astonishing that the man who made the world bop to "Karma Chameleon" in 1983 could have written the haunting aria "Talk Amongst Yourselves." Boy George plays the Australian-born performance artist Leigh Bowery (who ran a club called Taboo), and Euan Morton plays the young Boy George. Unfortunately, Bowery's character is insufficiently embodied, and he's not the heart of the show. Bowery should be played by a star, but Boy George is the wrong star; he has a singer's sense of the stage, not an actor's. Charles Busch's campy script covers the whole enterprise in the verbal equivalent of Day-Glo stretch pants. Directed by Christopher Renshaw. (11/24/03) (Plymouth, 235 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**TATJANA IN COLOR**
Beverly Cleary meets Nabokov in Julia Jordan's subversive new play, loosely based on a true story, about a twelve-year-old Austrian girl (Kate Wetherhead) who becomes obsessed with the artist Egon Schiele (Glenn Fitzgerald). Beautifully directed by Will Pomerantz. (Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100. Closes Nov. 30.)

**THE VIOLET HOUR**
Robert Sean Leonard has the clean-cut good looks of an unremarkable businessman, but his lightly worn officiousness makes him attractive; you want to unleash the passion behind the starched shirt. In a new play by Richard Greenberg ("Take Me Out"), Leonard plays John Pace Seavering (the name is pure, monogrammed privilege), a young New York publisher who must choose between a manuscript by his lover and one by a male school friend. Directed by Evan Yionoulis. (11/17/03) (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

**WHERE WE'RE BORN**
In Lucy Thurber's fatalistic drama, Lily returns from college to her grim Massachusetts home town and falls in with her cousin Tony, a well-meaning blue-collar worker whose life is at a dead end at the age of twenty-three. The bond between the cousins (played by Marin Ireland and Thomas Sadowski) is complicated by Tony's girlfriend, Franky (the commanding Sara Surrey), who develops a passion for Lily, too, and lets the impulse move from unexpressed to explicit. Sharply directed by Will Frears. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

**WHO'S YOUR DADDY**
Wendy Spero's father, whom she calls Gary, died when she was nine months old, so she was raised by her mother, an overprotective, Dr. Ruth-like sex therapist. In her touching one-woman comedy show, the pixieish Spero unspools the narrative of her life, from smoking a joint with her boss to finding her father's college diary. (Upright Citizen's Brigade, 307 W. 26th St. 212-366-9176.)

**WICKED**
A new musical telling the backstory of "The Wizard of Oz" is an exercise in high camp. "The Wizard of Oz" was dedicated to hope; "Wicked" is dedicated to irony. The Wicked Witch, Elphaba (played by the excellent Idina Menzel), turns out to be good, while Glinda the Good (Kristen Chenoweth) is exposed as a smug, ambitious, manipulative bitch, with little talent for sorcery. (11/10/03) (Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.)

**WONDERFUL TOWN**
A revival of the musical based on the book "My Sister Eileen," which was derived from Ruth McKenney's *New Yorker* stories about her sister in Greenwich Village. With music by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Comden and Green. Directed by Kathleen Marshall. (Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

**WOOSTER GROUP**
The downtown company presents a monthlong run of a work in progress. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 212-966-3651.)

## LONG RUNS

**AIDA**
Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4747.

**AVENUE Q**
Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

**BEAUTY AND THE BEAST**
Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 212-307-4747.

**BECKETT/ALBEE**
Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.

**BLUE MAN GROUP**
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 212-254-4370.

**BOOBS! THE MUSICAL**
Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 212-239-6200.

**CABARET**
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.

**CARNIVAL KNOWLEDGE**
SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-239-6200.

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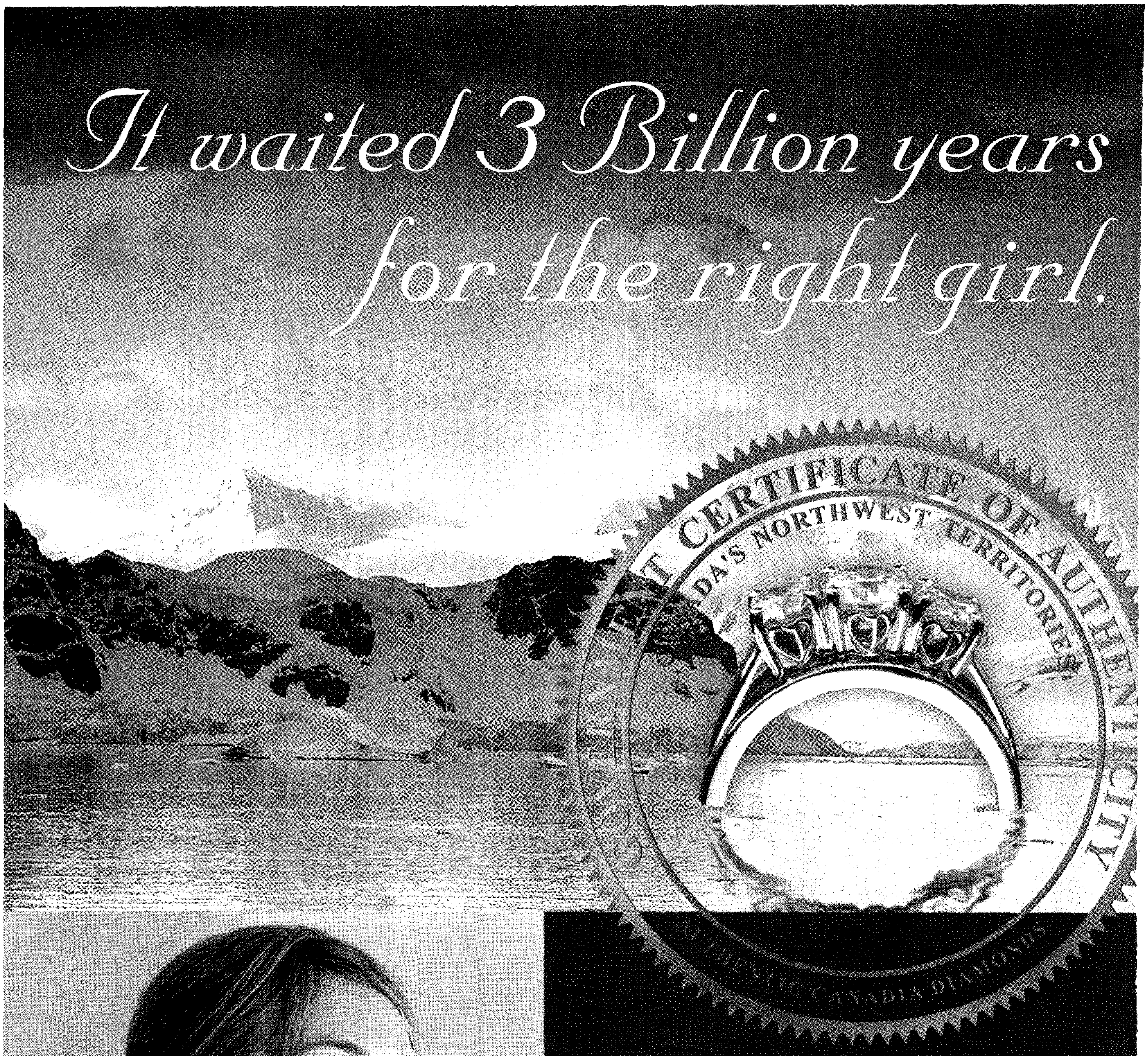
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## TABLES FOR TWO

**NICE MATIN**
201 W. 79th St. (212-873-6423)—During a working vacation in the French Riviera, Andy D'Amico, the chef at the old Sign of the Dove, and Simon Oren, the owner of L'Express and French Roast, came up with the idea for a sunny restaurant on the Upper West Side that would mix the strong flavors of Southern France with a mostly walk-in approach.

The room is noisy and the décor is an odd mix of pool tiles, *pension* wallpaper, and Folies-Bergère light fixtures, but after an hors d'oeuvre or two—chickpea fries or stuffed sardines, for instance—it's easy to get swept away. The menu is designed for grazing. There's a slew of appetizers, like *pistou* and squash-blossom beignets. The fava-bean tortelloni and the chopped mackerel with grapefruit are such carefully calibrated interpretations that the *pissaladière* comes as an unwelcome surprise: the overly literal translation of the signature dish of Nice is a niche-market mess of onions and anchovies on a thin-crust pizza. The misstep is an exception. D'Amico's menu is full of strong and unforgettable dishes, like the fries with rosemary and the hamburger with aioli and *comté* cheese (they call it the five-napkin burger). The *boeuf en daube*, cooked with hints of orange, is a showstopper in the falling-off-the-bone style.

Nice Matin differs from Aix and Ouest, its principal rivals on the Upper West Side, in that it serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner largely without sticker shock and aims for a steady local crowd. The strategy is well served by the easygoing wait staff; the sommelier, Guy Goldstein, sent over a flight of dessert wines, and the Scottish waitress, Fiona Pryde, explained that the chocolate-banana tart was so good because the dessert chef was a "chocolate anorak"—a native phrase meaning choco-geek. (Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Entrées $12.50-$23.75.)

—*Kevin Conley*

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**42ND STREET**
Ford Center, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

**GYPSY**
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

**HAIRSPRAY**
Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100.

**I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE**
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.

**KIKI AND HERB: COUP DE THÉÂTRE**
Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St., between Bedford and Hudson Sts. 212-239-6200.

**THE LION KING**
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.

**MAMMA MIA!**
Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-563-5544.

**MOVIN' OUT**
Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-307-4100.

**NINE**
Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.

**THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA**
Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

**PRIVATE JOKES, PUBLIC PLACES**
Theatre at the Center for Architecture, 536 LaGuardia Pl. 212-239-6200.

**THE PRODUCERS**
St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

**RENT**
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 212-921-8000.

**THE RIVALS**
Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.

**ROUNDING THIRD**
John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.

**STOMP**
Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 212-477-2477.

**TAKE ME OUT**
Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.

**THE THING ABOUT MEN**
Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200.

**THOROUGHLY MODERN MILLIE**
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.

**TRUMBO**
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.

**URINETOWN**
Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.

## DANCE

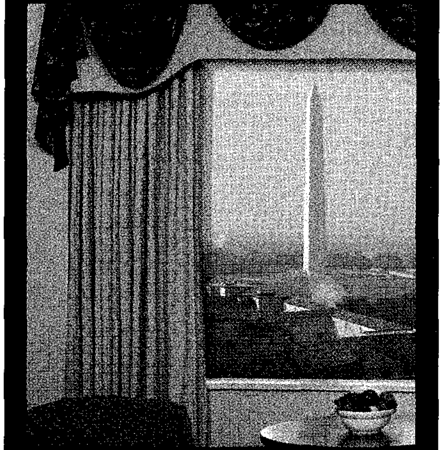
**NEW YORK CITY BALLET**
In Balanchine's "Nutcracker," the Christmas party is gemütlich, the nightmare scary, the tree tall, and Candyland exactly what it should be: a child's dream of heaven. Tchaikovsky wrote the music at the peak of his powers as a fabulist, and Balanchine's imagination rose to meet it. Best bets: the Friday-night and Sunday-matinée performances, at which Maria Kowroski and Charles Askegard are the Sugarplum Fairy and her Cavalier, Jennie Somogyi is Dewdrop, and Robert La Fosse is Drosselmeier. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Nov. 28 at 8, Nov. 29 at 2 and 8, Nov. 30 at 1 and 5, and Dec. 2 at 6.)

**LES BALLETS JAZZ DE MONTRÉAL**
Like its Chicago cousin, Hubbard Street, this ensemble has recently ventured beyond the finger-snapping fare for which it's been famous since the seventies and into the artier realm of international-style contemporary ballet. "Short Works: 24," by the Ballett Frankfurt alumna Crystal Pite, consists of twenty-four aphoristic sketches, each about a minute long. In Patrick Delcroix's primal "Sous le Rythme, Je," men in briefs dance while women play simple percussion; then they switch. Amid such high-concept work, the writhing in Mia Michaels' jazz piece "No Strings Attached" seems anachronistic and fun. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 2 at 8. Through Dec. 7.)

**DANCE CUBA**
Billed as the Cuban "Riverdance," this troupe of sixteen women, led by the choreographer Lizt Alfonso, is more like the Rockettes. They wear flamenco pumps instead of tap shoes and swirl ruffled skirts or black flared trousers instead of showing leg, but the disciplined precision is the same. Accompanied by musicians who play and sing Afro-Cuban music and Spanish flamenco. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Nov. 28 and Nov. 29 at 2 and 7 and Nov. 30 at noon and 5.)

**NOCHE FLAMENCA**
The tenth-anniversary performances of Martin Santangelo's Madrid-based company. His six musicians are male, but the three dancers are women, one of them Santangelo's wife, Soledad Barrio, whose dancing exemplifies the authenticity, ardor, and depth of the troupe's pared-down aesthetic. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-239-6200. Nov. 25-26 and Nov. 28 at 8, Nov. 29 at 3 and 8, and Nov. 30 at 3.)

**MARIA BENITEZ TEATRO FLAMENCO**
With at least three companies in town performing flamenco this month, there might seem to be little demand for another. Yet this Santa Fe-based troupe offers a distinct vision. Instead of choosing between the improvised solos of *flamenco puro* and the unison ensembles of *flamenco nuevo*, the group presents both and even includes Spanish traditional dance. The results vary, but the performances of Benitez and the demonically intense Alejandro Granados



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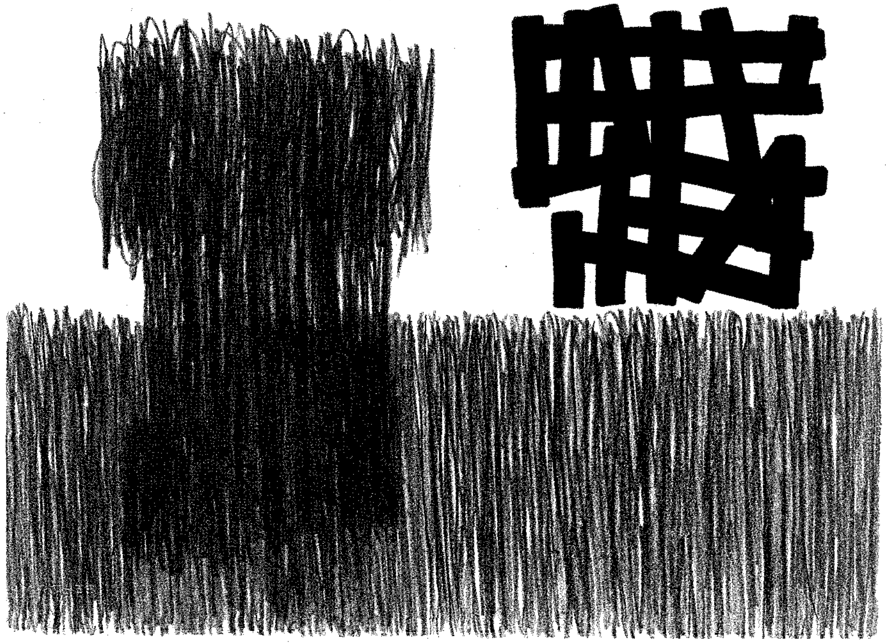
are consistently redeeming. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Nov. 25-26 and Nov. 28 at 8, Nov. 29 at 2 and 8, and Nov. 30 at 2 and 7:30.)

**KOOSIL-JA**

In an evening called "mech[a] and output," a spare deconstruction of an eighth-century Noh play, the Korean-born dancer Koosil-ja brandishes a vinyl handbag and dances with a swinging plastic cube. As she turns, a fantasy landscape by Benton-C Bainbridge blazes behind her on a screen, shifting with her stamping feet. The performance is accompanied by an electronic score of ominous gurgles and thuds by Geoff Matters. (Nest, 88 Front St., Dumbo, Brooklyn. For reservations, call 212-375-0189. Nov. 26 and Nov. 28-30 at 8. Through Dec. 21.)



EARLY THAW *Jonathan Lasker, the chilly deconstructor of abstract painting, heats up in a show of mostly recent drawings at the Sperone Westwater gallery downtown. His familiar vocabulary of clunky patterns and frozen gestures is tugged toward reverie by evident emotion. Specific genres—interior, still-life, cityscape, Surrealist personnage—insinuate themselves. Spontaneity intrudes. Warm color prevails. This surprisingly moving show hints at a vulnerable heart beneath Lasker's domineering style.—Peter Schjeldahl*

**MOVEMENT RESEARCH**

With the help of Danspace, the downtown dance organization celebrates twenty-five years of process-oriented experimentation with a series of dances, beginning with an evening of performance by the relentlessly radical veteran Kenneth King, dramatizing selections from his new book of essays, "Writing in Motion: Body—Language—Technology." King's writing can be abstruse, but in "WORD RAID," based on a series of tongue twisters, his language becomes accessible, and in "Hotel Tiresias," performed with Frances Alenikoff, who chants nonsense syllables, it entertains. The series continues the following week with dance improvisations by Ralph Lemon, Osmany Tellez, Astrud Angarita, Chris Aiken, and others. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Dec. 2 at 8:30. Through Dec. 7.)

## NIGHT LIFE

## CONCERTS

**RUFUS WAINWRIGHT**

On his third and most recent album, "Want One," Wainwright and his producers crafted an example of modern pop at its most baroque: choral and orchestral arrangements soar through gorgeous melodies. His songs are concerned, for the most part, with longing and disappointment (he's Morrissey without the cynicism), and he pines with considerable charm. In concert these tunes will lose some of the lush production details, allowing Wainwright's outsized romantic voice to float to the top. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-840-2824. Nov. 25-26 at 8.)

**MOODY BLUES**

Britain's venerable art-rock band recently entered the studio to record a Christmas album, "December," made up mostly of original material. It is as meticulously crafted as one would expect from the ensemble that gave the world the string-swept "Nights in White Satin," a classic they're sure to perform alongside their Yuletide fare. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Nov. 25-26 at 8.)

**GILBERTO SANTA ROSA**

The Gentleman of Salsa performs a tribute to the legendary bandleader and composer Tito Rodríguez. With the Puerto Rican singer **José (Cheo) Feliciano.** (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Nov. 26 at 8.)

**BRAND NEW**

These rising stars of the earnestly impassioned emo scene stand out from the pack by leavening the genre's pathos with a bit of spite. The video for their single "The Quiet Things That No One Ever Knows" (featuring a harrowing narrative about the aftermath of a car crash) raised their profile, and they now look like heirs of the Smiths. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 212-307-7171. Nov. 28 at 7:30.)

**MOE.**

The irrepressible jam band and its dedicated fans (affectionately known as moe.rons) celebrate Thanksgiving. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 212-496-7070. Nov. 28-29 at 7:30.)

**HARRY CONNICK, JR.**

Fault his mannered presentation all you want, but Connick, who settles in for a holiday engagement with his big band, won't stop until he has won an audience over. (City Center. Nov. 28-29 at 8.)

## CLUBS

*Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.*

**BAM CAFÉ**

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—Nov. 28-29: The exhilarating Brooklyn-based vocalist **Wunmi,** an alumna of the Soul II Soul collective, brings her personal style of soulful funk to the stage.

**B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL**

237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Nov. 27: **Pinetop Perkins.** He's ninety years old, but the pianist and veteran of Muddy Waters' band has yet to slow down. Nov. 29: The **Machine** scrupulously re-creates the Pink Floyd back catalogue for diehard fans who pine for their heroes' unlikely return from a perpetual state of post-litigious acrimony.

**BOWERY BALLROOM**

6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Nov. 27: Moonlighting from his gig as one-half of Everything But the Girl, **Ben Watt** takes to the turntables and trades in the soulfully wistful tunes of his bittersweet pop duo for the deep-house music of his new independent record label, Buzzin' Fly. Dec. 1: Beloved in Europe but largely ignored in the States, New York City's own **Fun Lovin' Criminals** have honed their style since their mid-nineties début, when they were written off by many as a watered-down version of the Beastie Boys. By fusing hip-hop styles and mischievous braggadocio with live instrumentation, the band has become sleeker and funkier. The Criminals' latest album, "Welcome to Poppy's," proves that their underdog status hasn't affected their self-confidence.

**CBGB & OMFUG**

315 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (212-982-4052)—Nov. 26: Seattle's **Vendetta Red** brings its big choruses, po-faced pageantry, and anthemic (if occasionally shrill) fare to the intimate confines of this punk-rock mecca.

**COPACABANA**

560 W. 34th St. (212-239-2672)—Nov. 28: It's been nearly twenty years since the Spanish rock group **Hombres G** hit it big at home with "Devuélveme a Mi Chica," a light and poppy ode to the travails of young love (some of its lyrics translate as "Give me back my girl / or you will be doubling up in itching powder"). After seven hugely successful albums (the last of which was 1992's "La Historia del Bikini"), the fun-loving foursome dissolved as the band members grew up and had families. Perhaps realizing that their fans had aged but not abandoned them, the band recently reunited, released a new collection, "Peligrosamente Juntos," and hit the road. Call it nostalgia *en español.*

**FEZ**

380 Lafayette St. (212-533-7000)—Nov. 29: The smart and sexy burlesque show the **Va Va Voom Room** presents its last performance until next February. The show, which is going on the road (it will be in San Francisco on Friday nights next month), is presided over by Miss Astrid, an eye-patch-wearing, cigarette-smoking, lost love child of Marlene Dietrich. The fierce and world-weary brunette disciplines unruly audience members (at a recent performance she punished a young couple, at the show to celebrate their engagement, for the drunken excesses of their friends by sending the pair through a spanking machine on stage). The acts include Dirty Martini, a shapely blonde the size of a '56 Buick who is known for disrobing on pointe (she's a classically trained ballerina), and the World Famous *BOB*, a buxom woman who mixes cocktails with her breasts. Singers, comedians, and other dancers (not all of them female) round out the show. The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

**IRVING PLAZA**

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Nov. 28-29: **Karl Denson's Tiny Universe.** The jazz saxophonist Denson, who contributed to Lenny Kravitz's early albums (that solo on "Let Love Rule" belongs to him), was one of the founders of the early-nineties acid-jazz group the Greyboy Allstars. Since then Denson has grown increasingly

funky, and with his Tiny Universe band he's turned his dedication to dance grooves into an underground success with jam-band fans across the country.

**JOE'S PUB**

425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Nov. 28: **Elysian Fields** are a local duo made up of the guitarist Oren Bloedow and the nearly implausibly sultry chanteuse Jennifer Charles, who have been making exceptionally languid, sensuous music since 1990. Though rumors of their fabled, never released album recorded with the producer Steve Albini continue to swirl, the Fields are currently promoting their new album, "Dreams That Breathe Your Name."

**KNITTING FACTORY**

74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (212-219-3055)—Nov. 26: By using a cello and the mixing board instead of the standard guitar-and-keyboard new-band setup, the Bay Area transplants **Out Hud** create layered, distortion-heavy songs with one common denominator—they're universally danceable. Sample song title: "The L Train Is a Swell Train and I Don't Want to Hear You Indies Complain." Nov. 28-29: Born from the ashes of the equally hushed Galaxie 500, Dean Wareham's **Luna** proves that you don't have to make a big noise to burn brightly. A longtime favorite of the Lower East Side music scene, Luna has built a substantial following based on their endearing, lo-fi music, which is full of references to their downtown-Manhattan forefathers, the Velvet Underground and Television. The opening band on Nov. 28 is **Aspera,** a group that has gradually moved from its signature psychedelic space rock to embrace more electronic influences. At a recent show, guitars played in the trebly range of synthesizers combined with actual synthesizers to produce occasionally ethereal, occasionally grating textures.

**NORTHSIX**

66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—Nov. 26: The **Secret Machines,** an indie-rock trio from Texas, shun the current fascination with angular eighties post-punk for a psychedelic approach that calls to mind Pink Floyd during its "Live at Pompeii" days.

**SIDEWALK CAFÉ**

94 Avenue A, at 6th St. (212-473-7373)—Nov. 29: **Testosterone Kills.** The openly gay duo of Tim Daly and Pablo Ratliff, two of the leading lights of the downtown anti-folk scene, write politically aware, mostly acoustic-guitar-driven songs full of personal details (sample lyrics: "I like N*SYNC because they make me horny," "I think that I am entitled to vent so . . . / 'Fuck you!' "). Dec. 2: **Jessie Murphy,** a winning local singer-songwriter who wields a bluesy guitar.

**S.O.B.'S**

204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—Nov. 26: **Basement Bhangra,** a long-running monthly party featuring ecstatic dance music that fuses an ancient Punjabi harvest festival with the technological wonders of underground London. Dining.

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

**ALGONQUIN HOTEL**

59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through Jan. 24: The cabaret icon **Andrea Marcovicci** embraces the enchanting songs of Frank Loesser ("Guys and Dolls," "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying"). Dining.

**BIRDLAND**

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Nov. 26-29: The last time we heard **Regina Carter,** she was holding court at Carnegie Hall, toting an eighteenth-century violin once owned by the classical master Paganini. The venue and specific instrument may be more prosaic this time around, but Carter will no doubt display her usual ebullience and commanding technical skills. Dining.

**BLUE NOTE**

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Through Nov. 30: **Toots Thielemans,** the lyrical genius of the jazz harmonica, is joined by the pianist **Kenny Werner** and two Brazilian musical luminaries, the guitarist **Oscar Castro-Neves** and the percussionist **Airto Moreira.**

**CARLYLE HOTEL**

Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and, through Dec. 31, **Bobby Short.**

**FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY**

540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Starting Nov. 25: As ecumenical as he is enthusiastic, **Michael Feinstein** presents his annual Great American Holiday Songbook program. A cultural grab bag of mirth and heartfelt sentiment, the evening should be a good antidote to the Yule-time blues.

**IRIDIUM**

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Through Nov. 30: You'd think that if you'd turned seventy-six you'd start taking it a bit easier onstage. Not the master alto saxophonist **Lee Konitz,** who'll celebrate his birthday with a cadre of rigorous post-bop improvisers including the guitarist **Bill Frisell** and the bassist **Gary Peacock.** It'll be fascinating to see who pushes who more: the leader or his enlightened bandmates. The pop vocalist **Elvis Costello** sits in on opening night. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

**JAZZ STANDARD**

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Nov. 25-26: **Jason Linder,** best known for his high-spirited, if now less frequently convened, big band, exhibits his skilled piano work and appropriately scaled compositions with his trio. Sharing the bill is the **Helen Sung** quartet. A fresh face on the scene, the pianist Sung presents work from her newly released début recording, "Push." Nov. 28-30: The **Frank Morgan** quartet. We haven't heard from the altoist Morgan in quite some time, and it's good to have him back.

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REWARDS
3728 423456 71008

An amalgam of Charlie Parker, Johnny Hodges, and Art Pepper, Morgan has a luscious tone and an authentic bebop sensibility. He can be both extravagantly heated and touchingly reticent; his New York appearances are now official events. Dining.

**JOE'S PUB**
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Nov. 29: Although Miles Davis's mid-seventies recordings (notably "On the Corner"), with their colliding mélange of jazz, funk, and world-music textures, initially confounded listeners, the music cast a giant shadow on today's jazz players. Paying homage to that disturbingly vibrant sound is the collective band **Children on the Corner,** featuring such significant Davis vets as the electric bassist **Michael Henderson,** the saxophonist **Sonny Fortune,** and the percussionist **Badal Roy.** Nov. 30: **Dave Burrell** has graced the bands of adventurous leaders from Archie Shepp in the sixties to David Murray in the eighties, but the pianist is more than just an illustrious sideman. He's a compelling composer and a daring, historically aware player. Here he'll be joined by two free-thinking heavyweights: the drummer **Andrew Cyrille** and the bassist **William Parker.**

**UP OVER JAZZ CAFÉ**
351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—Nov. 28-29: The **Wycliffe Gordon** sextet. Gordon's shaping up to be the premier trombonist of his generation, thanks to his lusty mix of New Orleans historicism and lucid eloquence.

**VILLAGE VANGUARD**
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Through Nov. 30: The **Lou Donaldson** quartet. The alto saxophonist Donaldson is a dazzling veteran bop player ever ready to tangle with his marvellous organist, **Dr. Lonnie Smith.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

*Man Ray's photograph of the Surrealist poet Lise Deharme, from 1935, at Carosso Fine Art.*

## ART MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

**METROPOLITAN MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-879-5500)—The Philip Guston retrospective preserves the shock of the major painter's late-career switch, around 1967, from a tremblingly sensitive abstract style to raucous cartooning: gregarious Ku Klux Klansmen, piled-up shoes and hairy legs, one-eyed heads like lima beans in need of a shave. It was a cultural departure as harshly significant as Bob Dylan's at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965. "I got sick and tired of all that purity," Guston said of his former compunctions. Many people hated the change, which put the artist's eloquent touch and color at the service of an abject vision. Who knew that late Guston would turn out to be the most influential American painting of the last quarter-century? Through Jan. 4. ♦ The tremendous El Greco retrospective celebrates art history's No. 1 troublemaker, the Cretan icon painter who got sophisticated in Venice and Rome and then, settling in Toledo in 1576, hit his stride as a pictorial mystic and rhapsode of the Counter-Reformation. His absolute originality—or weirdness, if you prefer—inspired Picasso and Pollock and still feels rawly new. The show emphasizes El Greco's more conventional, first-rate portraiture, but his vertiginous incarnations of ecclesiastical dogma are the main event. Their pictorial method (ascending figures elongate like blobs in a Lava lamp) suggests upside-down gravity. Through Jan. 11. ♦ **"Bravehearts: Men in Skirts"** looks at the many cultures in which men wear skirts and the various uniformly unsuccessful attempts of fashion designers to add the item to the wardrobes of the men in this culture. Through Feb. 8. ♦ **"Treasures of a Lost Art: Italian Manuscript Painting of the Middle Ages and Renaissance."** Through Feb. 1. ♦ **"The Dawn of Photography: French Daguerreotypes, 1839-1855."** Through Jan. 4. ♦ **"Dreams of Yellow Mountain: Landscapes of Survival in Seventeenth-Century China."** Through Jan. 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

**MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)**
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (212-708-9400)—For **"Artist's Choice: Mona Hatoum, Here Is Elsewhere,"** the Palestinian and British artist chooses works from the museum's permanent collection, including examples by Cindy Sherman, Robert Gober, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Francis Alÿs. Through Feb. 2. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

**GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"James Rosenquist"** is a pinball machine of a retrospective, gracing the museum's ramp with two-dimensional equivalents of rackety lights and bumpers. The early Pop work, which uses billboard-painting technique to create surrealistic montages of slightly outdated magazine imagery, feels immortal. It nails a recurrent effect of modernity: the rolling blind spot of the recent past. Bigger, slicker later paintings succumb to mere razzmatazz. But Rosenquist earns blanket forgiveness on the strength of his classic "F-111" (1964-65), a multi-panelled wraparound work, eighty-six feet long, that distills the madnesses of the nineteen-sixties with supple, violent majesty. Some people deem it the Great American Painting. Others have yet to look at it sufficiently. Through Jan. 25. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

**WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART**
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3676)—Two retrospectives, of the drawings of Arshile Gorky and the paintings of John Currin, through Feb. 15 and Feb. 22, respectively. ♦ Lucas Samaras's inexhaustible fascination with his own image led to projects that prefigure everyone from Cindy Sherman to John Coplans, and his psychedelic bent and eccentric passion for the handmade look especially fresh in **"Unrepentant Ego: The Self-Portraits of Lucas Samaras."** The artist, who was born in Greece in 1936, moved to New Jersey with his family at the age of twelve; he later studied at Rutgers with the "happenings" honcho Allan Kaprow. He dreamed of being an actor and dealt with this frustrated desire in staged Polaroids (strung together they suggest storyboards for a one-man drag show), and he incorporated copies of his head shots into his elaborately constructed boxes (in one, strips of the image grace the handles of cutlery). The show is so mind-bendingly captivating that by the time viewers reach the mirrored sculpture at the end they may be disappointed to see their own face, rather than Samaras's, gazing back at them. Through Feb. 8. ♦ **"Beside the Rose: Selected Works by Jay DeFeo."** Through Feb. 29. (Open Wednesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

**WHITNEY MUSEUM AT ALTRIA**
120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (212-878-2550)—What do you get when you cross a minimalist box with a hip-hop backbeat? It's an odd question, but Luis Gispert's installation sets about broadcasting the answer, and it makes pulsating, oddly perfect sense. His angular plywood construction includes a duct draped with silver chains, geometric wall drawings suggestive of woofers and tweeters, and some tell-tale stereo equipment. Things seem too quiet? Sit down in the bench-like nook: hidden motion sensors turn on a private sense experience. Through March 12. (Open weekdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)

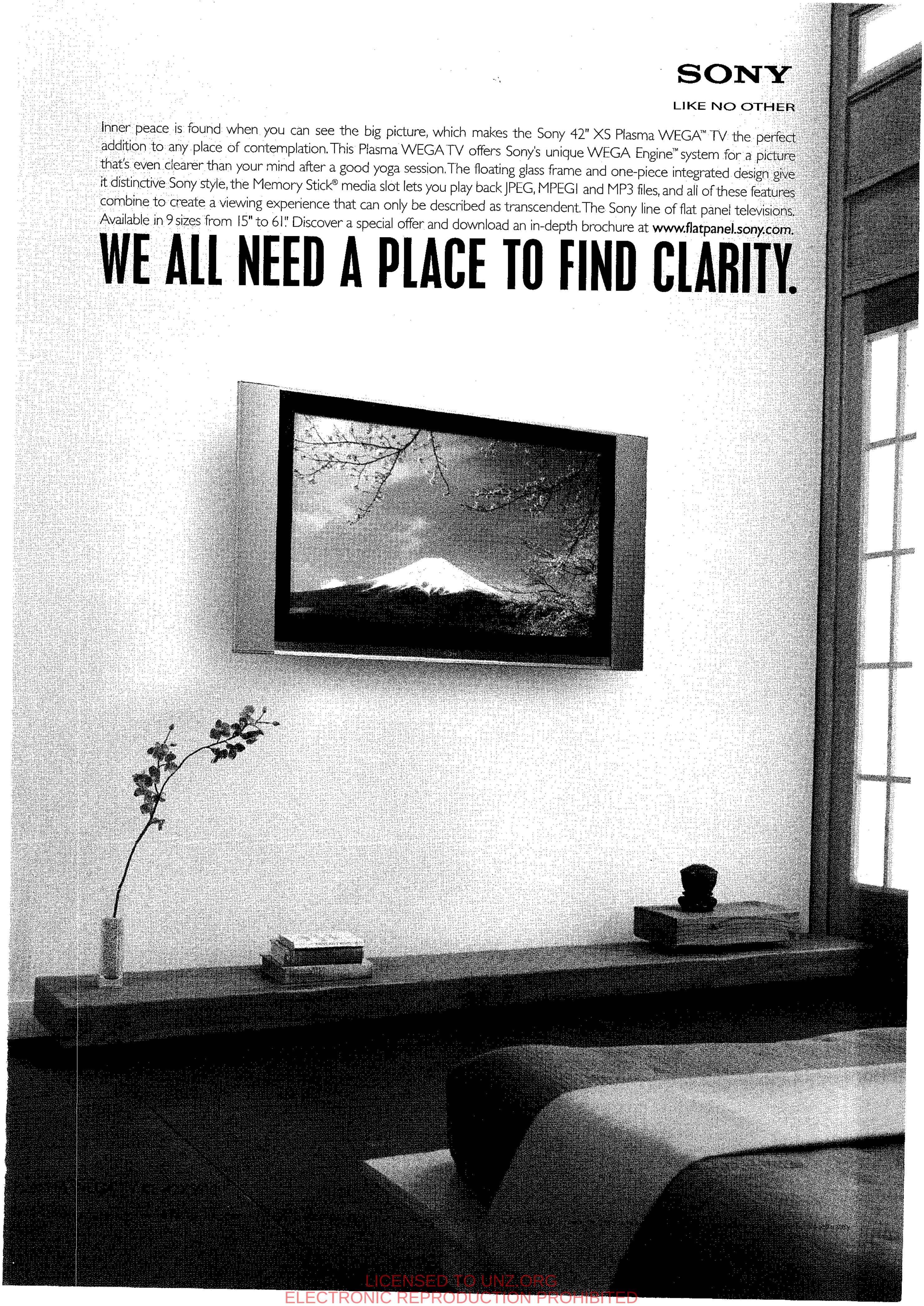
**DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS**
548 W. 22nd St. (212-989-5566)—The strange career of Jorge Pardo, the Cuban-born design virtuoso and the art world's doyen of decorative chic, now includes architecture. Skeletal pavilions of thick, eccentrically jigsawed, pale birch plywood are Gehry-esque feats pulled off with computer-generated components, most of them unique; they're screwed together to form undulant, vaulted, delightful spaces. Based on the evidence here, Pardo's design system is elegant child's play. Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

*Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.*

**PHILIP GUSTON**
It's a good thing that Guston's work is so much fun to look at, because right now it's everywhere. This selection, partly borrowed from private collections and partly for sale, purportedly examines the painter's investigation of "mind and matter." What that translates to is big-nosed goofballs slurping plates of spaghetti, impastoed piles of human boots and horseshoes, and a bacon sandwich rendered in thick pink paint that might be the anti-Platonic conception of all bacon sandwiches. One of the show's best pieces (and one that does illustrate the premise of the show) is a supremely simple line drawing that could depict a cave door, a tombstone, or infinity. Through Dec. 23. (McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-688-5951.)

**KIM SOOJA**
Just because it's an ancient art form designed to spur contemplation doesn't mean the mandala can't be funky. Kim attaches four big, circular, spangled, gaudily lit jukebox speakers to the four walls of a serenely dimmed, blue painted room—their mirrored centers spin, their lights flash, and



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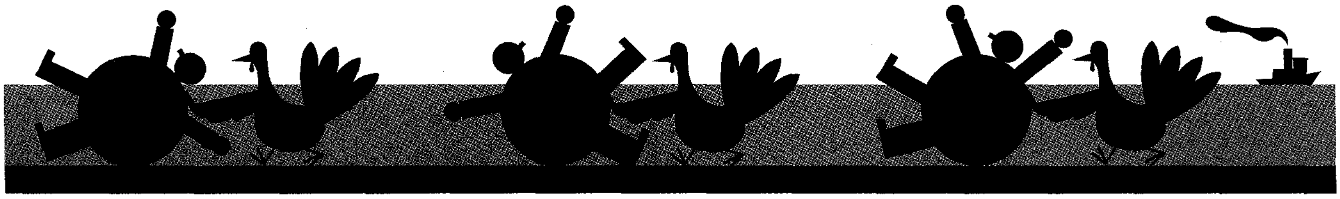


*The post-Thanksgiving Walk Off the Turkey trek offers overeaters a chance to atone for their ways (see Above and Beyond).*

RICHARD MCGUIRE

they emanate the haunting sounds of Tibetan, Islamic, and Gregorian chant. It's simultaneously toe tapping and spirit soothing. Kim's title for the work is "Mandala: Zone of Zero," and to enter this little haven from busy West Fifty-seventh Street is to get a taste of emptiness in the Buddhist sense: plenteous, humorous, generous. Through Dec. 20. (The Project, 37 W. 57th St. 212-688-4673.)

**TABITHA VEVERS**
The traditional Mexican devotional paintings known as retablos usually depict a moment of miraculously averted near-disaster (described in small print below the image) and are intended to thank the saint responsible for such protection. Vevers borrows the form in these delicately detailed oil paintings on small metal panels. But her retablos depict dreams of flying recounted by her friends, and these miracles are both familiar and surreal: one woman sails through space on her grandma's silver serving tray, another rises into the air to escape "a spiritually-adept cat-burglary type" who's chasing her. Through Dec. 6. (Kraushaar, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-307-5730.)

**"SARGENT'S WOMEN"**
The supposed focal point of this uneven show is the infamous Madame X. But out of fifty-two works just three are pencil studies for Sargent's portrait (two are on loan from the Met, which also owns the painting) installed alongside a ledger detailing the lady's purchase of powder (her complexion was famously pale). More thrilling is the selection of oil studies of gypsy dancers, including a small gem depicting a sultry woman in a golden shawl with the word "olé" scattered around her ecstatic figure like strands of wayward fringe. Through Dec. 13. (Adelson, 25 E. 77th St. 212-439-6800.)

### *Short List*

**JOSEPH CORNELL**
Feigen, 34 E. 69th St. 212-628-0700.
Through Jan. 16.

## GALLERIES-CHELSEA

**E. V. DAY**
Spectacular sculptural installations, spotlighted or blacklighted in black rooms, by an artist who is known for being preoccupied with aeronautics and underwear. Here intimate apparel joins monofilament and eggs in hanging, stalactitic masses of wet-looking glass and fibreglass, with stalagmitic masses on the floor beneath them. Off by itself in a darkened room, the suspended shape of a stealth fighter plane, about nine feet long, is traced in fluorescent-green monofilament. It's so lovely that one forgets to feel menaced. Through Dec. 20. (Urbach, 526 W. 26th St. 212-627-0974.)

**JEFF KOONS**
Koons has stopped innovating and gone into production. Big veristic sculptures of inflatable toys in molded and painted aluminum and Rosenquistian paintings of montaged advertising imagery, cartoons, and soft-core porn aim to satisfy your art needs. They've got *everything*: scale, color, kinky subject matter, no-expression expressiveness, incredible finish. There is abundant artifice and, in the paintings, passages of lush landscape, because who doesn't adore nature, too? Koons understands aesthetic appetite in the way that procurers understand lust—and he delivers. Resign yourself. This is a fabulous show. Through Dec. 19. (Sonnabend, 536 W. 22nd St. 212-627-1018.)

### *Short List*

**MATTHEW BUCKINGHAM**
Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 212-463-7372.
Through Dec. 20.

**ANNE CHU**
303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121.
Through Dec. 20.

**SHIRAZEH HOUSHIARY**
Lehmann Maupin, 540 W. 26th St.
212-255-2923. Through Dec. 20.

**JONATHAN LASKER**
Sperone Westwater, 415 W. 13th St.
212-999-7337. Through Dec. 13.

**JOHN WESLEY**
Fredericks Freiser, 504 W. 22nd St.
212-633-6555. Through Dec. 13.

## GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

**"WOMEN BEWARE WOMEN"**
Drawings the color of blood and lipstick, all portraits of women by Naomi Fisher, line the entrance to this cunning show, which takes its title from a Jacobean play by Thomas Middleton, rife with lust and slaughter. A triptych by Colleen Asper suggests a Northern Renaissance altarpiece by way of Anne Rice (ghostly flesh, dripping blood). "Moby-Dick" emerges as an unlikely subplot in a drawing, by Aaron Morse, of whalers caught in a shark attack, and, most hauntingly, in delicate drawings of lone sailors by Hernan Bas. The curator David Rimanelli, whose last show riffed on Flaubert, may be the art world's answer to Cliff's Notes. Through Dec. 20. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 212-343-7300.)

### *Short List*

**MARK LOMBARDI**
The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St.
212-219-2166. Through Dec. 18.

## PHOTOGRAPHY

**HENRY HORENSTEIN**
New gelatin-silver prints of portraits of bluegrass and country musicians and fans, taken in the nineteen-seventies. Horenstein, inspired by documentarians like Danny Lyons, put in serious time at honky-tonks—notably Tootsie's Orchid Lounge, across the alley from the back door of the old Ryman Auditorium in Nashville—and at dance halls and outdoor festivals, before the country-music scene got too slick. Polyester suits, big hair, and cans of Schlitz abound. Some of the portraits are candid (Jerry Lee Lewis lighting up a cigar at a Ramada Inn), some posed (Bill Monroe standing stiffly next to his tour bus), but all of them have a sweet poignancy. The photographs in the show are part of a new book of Horenstein's work, "Honky Tonk." Through Dec. 20. (Morthland, 511 W. 25th St. 212-242-7767.)

**LEN JENSHEL / DIANE COOK**
Spectacular and witty scenes from aquariums, taken by a husband-and-wife team. Jenshel's bright color pictures are best when they capture the fantasy and absurdity inherent in the aquarium experience. In one, a wan blonde in a shimmery mermaid costume skids under the surface of improbably blue water; in another, a blandly dressed couple is reflected in the wall of a tank that is aglow with anemones and sea urchins. Cook's slightly furry, quietly mysterious black-and-white photographs focus on the sea creatures in their unnatural environments—goggle-eyed flounders, as still and gray and startling as a bas-relief; a shark, its head craning toward the surface; and, best of all, in a three-panel image, a fleet of jellyfish who seem to plummet through the water's silvery depths like parachutes. Through Dec. 20. (Klotz/Sirmon, 511 W. 25th St. 212-741-4764.)

**MAN RAY**
Within a few months of Man Ray's arrival in Paris in 1921, he had become the house photographer of the literary and artistic avant-garde. This show of forty-six rare vintage prints includes famous images (Proust on his deathbed, Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein in front of the fireplace at 27 Rue de Fleurus); portraits of lesser-known figures, such as the bewitching Surrealist poet Lise Deharme, adorned with a hat of sticks and leaves; and a solarized image of Elsa Schiaparelli. In another picture, Erik Satie, whose music plays in the background at the gallery, peers at the photographer mischievously and familiarly. The catalogue to the show claims that Man Ray is the greatest portrait photographer of the twentieth century, which is hard to argue with. Through Dec. 20. (Carosso, 42 E. 76th St. 212-744-5400.)

**LEON STEELE**
Steele's richly colored images of the backs and haunches of cattle and horses create their own horizon lines. In one, a streak of white light across a black horse echoes a break in the dark sky above it. In another, eddies of white hair swirl in front of leafless trees. Steele uses the painstaking Carbro color process, a technique developed in the eighteen-sixties. Each print takes ten days to make, and another week to dry. Layers of pigments normally used in oil paints produce a three-dimensional, pointillistic effect that makes you want to pet the pictures. Through Dec. 20. (In Camera, 511 W. 25th St. 212-647-7667.)

### *Short List*

**ROBERT ADAMS**
Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200.
Through Dec. 20.

**JAMES CASABERE**
Kelly, 528 W. 29th St. 212-239-1181.
Through Dec. 6.

**TOM HUNTER**
Yancey Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St.
646-230-9610. Through Nov. 29.

**BILL JACOBSON**
Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410.
Through Nov. 29.

**NIKKI S. LEE**
Tonkonow, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-255-8450.
Through Dec. 20.

**ART SINSABAUGH**
Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.
Through Dec. 13.

**WOLFGANG TILLMANS**
Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-255-8450.
Through Dec. 20.

## AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

**SOTHEBY'S**
Dec. 2 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: Among the curiosities of this two-session sale of carpets from Persia, the Caucasus, Anatolia, India, Azerbaijan, and Western Europe is a square-foot-large carpet fragment

from a twin of the famous sixteenth-century Persian "Ardabil carpet," named after the shrine at Ardabil, where it is thought to have been found. Long believed to be one of a kind, it was exhibited in London in 1891 to great fanfare and was later acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum (thanks largely to William Morris, who led the fund-raising drive). Also on sale is a twenty-three-by-eleven-foot Persian "garden carpet," a depiction of a formal Safavid garden, complete with trees, stylized fish, flowers, a moat, and waterways, and a nineteenth-century carpet from southeast Persia depicting the "Leaders of the World" set in a kind of family tree that, oddly, includes Christopher Columbus, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, a Ferris wheel, and several tepees. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.)

**CHRISTIE'S**
Dec. 2 at 1 and Dec. 3 at 10 A.M.: The monthly House Sale, a selection of furniture, art works, and decorations offered at moderate prices. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.)

## CLASSICAL MUSIC

## OPERA

**METROPOLITAN OPERA**
The simple concept behind Jonathan Miller's traditional 1998 production of **"Le Nozze di Figaro"**—make the characters seem in every way alive, and let Mozart's themes of class conflict and sexual indiscretion take care of themselves—has made it one of the Met's enduring successes. Its roles are currently filled by an impressive cast that includes Hei-Kyung Hong, Dorothea Röschmann, Magdalena Kožená, Dwayne Croft, Ferruccio Furlanetto, Greg Fedderly, and Kurt Moll; James Levine conducts. (Nov. 26, Nov. 29, and Dec. 2 at 8.) ♦ **"La Bohème,"** with Cristina Gallardo-Domas, Emily Pulley, Vincenzo La Scola, and Mariusz Kwiecien; Daniel Oren. (Nov. 28 at 8.) ♦ The transcendent music in Strauss's four-hour-plus **"Die Frau Ohne Schatten"** (a fairy tale flanking the realms of a mythic Empress and an earthly working couple) can easily escape the shadow of the ludicrous story that the composer allowed Hugo von Hofmannsthal to foist upon him. But under the deft, conservative baton of Philippe Auguin, a new Met favorite, the orchestra's fine playing doesn't quite conjure up the requisite magic. Herbert Wernicke's stunning 2001 production—the Empress lives in a gigantic cube of mirrors, the lovers in an urban factory—spotlights the luxurious voice of Deborah Voigt amid some superb singing by Deborah Polaski (the Dyer's Wife), John Horton Murray (the Emperor), and Wolfgang Brendel (a lovingly songful Barak). (Nov. 29 at 12:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

## ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

**NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC**
When he isn't playing the stuffing out of Messiaen or Ligeti, the pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard likes to saunter into the standard repertory—but on his own terms. His latest Philharmonic performance includes Debussy's Fantasy for Piano and Orchestra, an early work that the composer banned from performance during his lifetime, and Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 1, a one-movement essay of irresistible melodic sweep. David Robertson, the conductor, winds things up with Strauss's "Also Sprach Zarathustra." (Nov. 26 and Dec. 2 at 7:30 and Nov. 28-29 at 8. Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

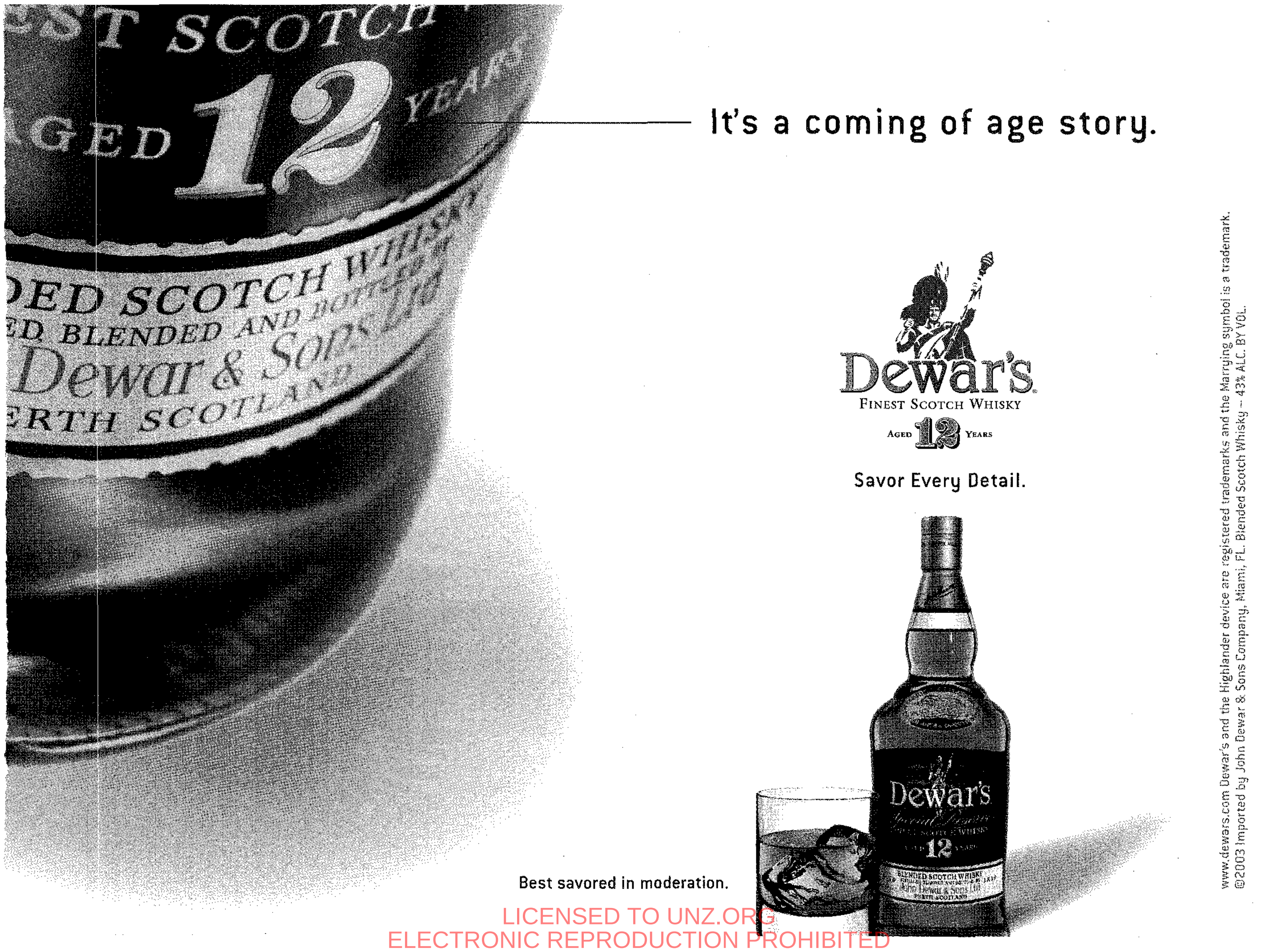
**BACH VESPERS**
Since 1968, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church has been presenting Sunday-afternoon performances (on period instruments) of the Bach Cantatas, scheduled according to the liturgical calendar that the composer himself followed. Cantata No. 61, "Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland," is the highlight of this Sunday's concert, sharing the program with works by Reger and Buxtehude. (W. 65th St. at Central Park W. 212-877-6815. Nov. 30 at 5. A donation is suggested.)

## RECITALS

**WOLFGANG HOLZMAIR**
Perhaps no one in this glorious age of baritones sings German lieder with more sensitivity and tonal color than Holzmair, whose tenor-like voice has a heraldic ring. His performing partner is the pianist Imogen Cooper, who plays with a bright tone and pinpoint detail. In their next concert, sponsored by the Austrian Cultural Forum, they offer a sheaf of Hugo Wolf songs, all on poems by Mörike (including "Im Frühling" and "Der Feuerreiter"). (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-319-5300, ext. 222. Nov. 26 at 8.)

**BARGEMUSIC**
Nov. 27-28 at 7:30: The violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja and the pianist Mihaela Ursuleasa offer a program of Bartók (the Romanian Dances), Liszt, Zykan, Enescu, and Cage ("Variations I"). ♦ Nov. 29 at 7:30 and Nov. 30 at 4: Schnittke's snarky "Moz-Art" (a duet for two violins) peeps out of a concert of standard repertory by Mozart, Chopin (the Cello Sonata), and Brahms (the Piano Quartet in G Minor). Kopatchinskaja, switching to viola, and Ursuleasa are joined by the violinist Mark Peskanov and the cellist Sol Gabetta. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

**SUNDAYS ON THE ISLAND**
Wolfram Koessel, the young cellist who runs this plucky little chamber-music series, teams up with the guitarist Oren Fader (and some string-playing colleagues) for a concert of works by Bach, Vivaldi, Boccherini, and others. The location is Le Refuge Inn, a charming French-style bed-and-breakfast



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nestled among the yacht slips and shore restaurants of City Island. (620 City Island Ave., the Bronx. 212-724-4474. Nov. 30 at 12:30.)

**MUSIC AT THE FRICK COLLECTION: HÅVARD GIMSE**
Scandinavian music (by Sibelius, Grieg, and the twentieth-century "Norse impressionist" Geirr Tveitt) forms the backbone of this young Norwegian pianist's New York début recital, which closes with Prokofiev's Sonata No. 8 in B-Flat Major. (1 E. 70th St. 212-288-0700. Nov. 30 at 5.)

**JUPITER SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS**
Beethoven's lilting Serenade for Flute, Violin, and Viola opens a program that, in the Jens Nygaard tradition, is filled out with curiosities: the Piano Quintet by Max Bruch and a "Grand Quintet," for strings, winds, and piano, by Frédéric Kalkbrenner, one of the great keyboard showoffs of early-nineteenth-century Paris. (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. 212-799-1259. Dec. 1 at 2 and 7:30.)

**CONTRASTS QUARTET**
This clarinet-violin-cello-piano foursome (whose name recalls Bartók's famous work for three of its instruments) has always been closely associated with the work of prominent contemporary composers—including that of Aaron Jay Kernis, who is the husband of the group's pianist, Evelyne Luest. Their next concert includes the New York premières of Kernis's "Fanfare con Fuoco" and Akira Miyoshi's "Perspective en Spirale," along with a world première from Derek Bermel and works marking Ned Rorem's eightieth birthday ("Spring Music") and the hundredth anniversary of Aram Khachaturian's birth. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Dec. 1 at 8.)

**JUILLIARD ARTISTS IN CONCERT**
The young Ariel Winds perform original and transcribed works for wind quintet by Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Falla, and Reicha. (180 Maiden Lane. Dec. 2 at 12:30. No tickets required.)

**"FIDDLEFEST AT CARNEGIE"**
A selection of big-name country, jazz, and classical artists (including Joshua Bell, Regina Carter, Diane Monroe, and Itzhak Perlman) gather to celebrate the achievements of Harlem's Opus 118 Center for Strings—made famous by the film "Music of the Heart"—in a gala concert dedicated to the memory of Isaac Stern. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 2 at 7:30.)

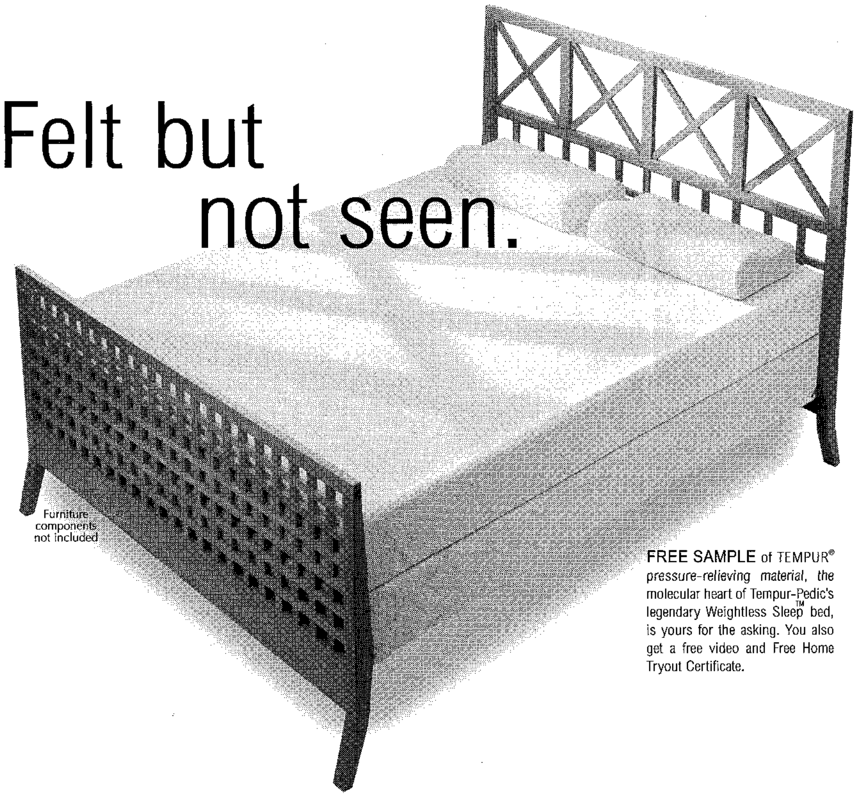
**NEW AMSTERDAM RECORDER TRIO**
Three players (from England, Israel, and the Netherlands) make their début with a program of works by Vivaldi, Hindemith, Christopher Tye, and others. (Church of the Epiphany, York Ave. at 74th St. Dec. 2 at 7:30. A donation is suggested.)

**SVETOSLAV STOYANOV**
The up-and-coming percussionist is the latest young musician to benefit from the support of the Concert Artists Guild, which sponsors his program of music by such composers as Ravel (a transcription of "Le Tombeau de Couperin"), Joseph Schwantner, and Leigh Howard Stevens at Weill Recital Hall. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 2 at 7:30.)

**KIMIKO HATA**
The soprano, with the pianist Eric Trudel, offers a program of songs by Schumann, Rachmaninoff, Dvořák, and Turina. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Dec. 2 at 8.)

## ABOVE AND BEYOND

**READINGS**
Dec. 1 at 7:30: The novelist Brando Skyhorse, the short-story writer Brian Schwartz, and the poet Jeff G. Lytle read from their work. (Junno's, 64 Downing St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ Dec. 1 at 8: Toni Morrison offers passages from her new novel, "Love." (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.) ♦ Dec. 2 at 7: The poets Joshua Beckman and Matthew Rohrer celebrate the release of their spoken-word CD, "Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty." (Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery, at Bleecker St. 212-614-0505.)



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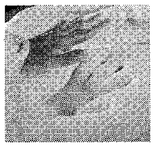

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## CLASSICAL NOTES

**POETIC LICENSE**

Back in the golden age of classical recordings, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau held the honor of being just about the only male singer whom "real" pianists—marquee names like Brendel, Richter, and Barenboim—would deign to accompany. The young British tenor Ian Bostridge is one of the very few singers who could claim such a distinction today. EMI has released two disks of Schubert songs with Bostridge and the phenomenal young Norwegian pianist Leif Ove Andsnes, who carries the show: each disk begins with a performance of one of the composer's late piano sonatas, with a selection of songs added on.

What makes the venture worthwhile is not only the genuine artistic bond between the two men but the novelty of the albums themselves, which give us a portrait of Schubert's colossal creativity in both the vocal and instrumental realms. Andsnes is a fine match for the magisterial grandeur of the sonatas (D Major, D. 850, and A Major, D. 959): the silky surface of his sounds, the astonishing evenness of his touch, and the implacable forward thrust of his tempos highlight, rather than diminish, the extreme emotional contrasts within these pieces. Bostridge has a sketchy lower range, and his high notes sometimes sound unhinged from the rest of his light and lovely voice. But his extraordinary sensitivity to the text puts him in Fischer-Dieskau territory. Each song, from the dreamily forlorn "Pilgerweise" to the quickly changing moods of the ballade-like "Im Walde," has a dramatic presence all its own.

**"Signs, Games, and Messages"** (ECM) is a cross-section of recent vocal and instrumental works by György Kurtág, a Hungarian expressionist whose intense and concentrated pieces have earned him cult-classic status. He is at his doleful best in the "Hölderlin Songs," undulating testaments to the mentally unstable Romantic poet who found peace in images of classical antiquity. The subtle baritone Kurt Widmer transforms the composer's shivering fragments into an exploration of the poet's personality. Equally impressive is "Pas à Pas—Nulle Part" ("Step by Step—Nowhere"), an extended setting of some thirty desolate Samuel Beckett poemlets. The title work, a series of miniatures for strings, reflects Kurtág's obsessions with Bartókian dances, ancient-sounding elegies, and brittle, vituperative études. The Orlando Trio, rigorously coached by the composer, plays them with a self-abnegating devotion that lets the ferocious honesty of Kurtág's music emerge with clarity and force.

*—Russell Platt*

**TALKS**

Dec. 1 at 5: The theatre critic David Finkle interviews Stephen-Adly Guirgis, the author of "Our Lady of 121st Street," among other plays. (The Drama Book Shop, 250 W. 40th St. 212-944-0595.) ♦ Dec. 1 at 7: The Burmese native Pascal Khoo Thwe discusses his memoir, "From the Land of Green Ghosts." The actor Ron Nakahara will also read from the book. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400.) ♦ Dec. 2 at 7: The celebrity photographer Patrick McMullan reminisces about the era immortalized in his new collection, "So80s: A Photographic Diary of a Decade." (Barnes & Noble, Sixth Ave. at 22nd St. No tickets necessary.)

**WALK**

Nov. 29 at 9 A.M.: Shorewalkers presents Walk Off the Turkey, its annual post-Thanksgiving Day stroll along the Hudson River from South Ferry to the Little Red Lighthouse, beneath the George Washington Bridge. For more information, call 212-663-2167.

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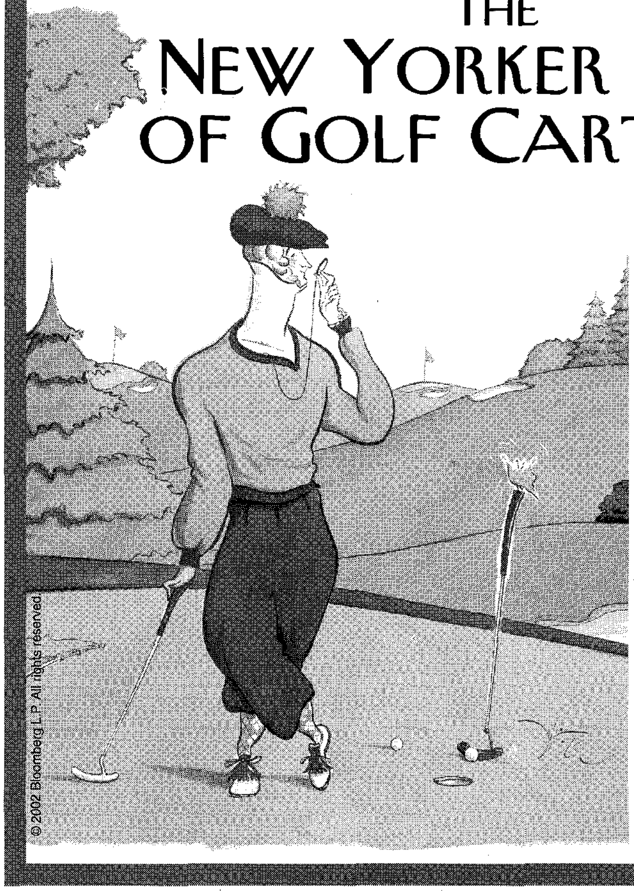

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## MOVIES OPENING

**BAD SANTA**
A dark comedy directed by Terry Zwigoff ("Ghost World") about a safecracker (Billy Bob Thornton) who poses as Santa Claus in order to rob department stores. With Bernie Mac, John Ritter, and Lauren Graham. Opening Nov. 26.

**EL BONAERENSE**
Pablo Trapero directed this Argentinean drama in which a provincial locksmith moves to Buenos Aires and joins a corrupt police unit. In Spanish. Opening Nov. 26. (Film Forum.)

**THE COOLER**
William H. Macy plays a Las Vegas casino denizen who infects other gamblers with his bad luck, in a drama co-written and directed by Wayne Kramer. Also with Maria Bello and Alec Baldwin. Opening Nov. 26.

**THE HAUNTED MANSION**
A family comedy in which a real-estate agent (Eddie Murphy) moves his family into a house filled with ghouls and ghosts. The cast includes Jennifer Tilly, Terence Stamp, and Wallace Shawn. Opening Nov. 26.

**HUKKLE**
An experimental Hungarian film set in a small village that begins with an old man hiccupping and develops into a murder mystery. György Pálfi wrote and directed. In Hungarian. Opening Nov. 28. (Cinema Village.)

**IN AMERICA**
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Nov. 26. (Beekman, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

**INDEPENDENT SPIRITS**
A documentary directed by Sybil DelGaudio about the pioneering animators John and Faith Hubley. Opening Nov. 28. (Quad Cinemas.)

**THE LEGEND OF LEIGH BOWERY**
Charles Atlas's cinematic tribute to the London night-club impresario and performance artist. Opening Nov. 28. (Cinema Village.)

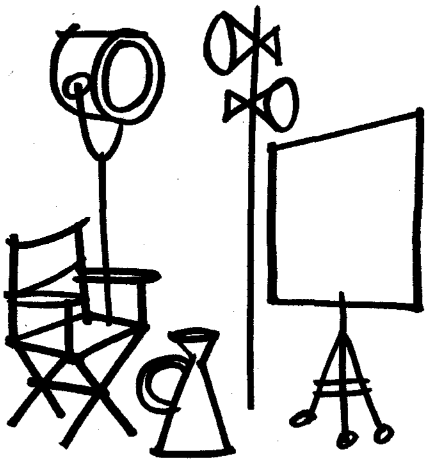
**MY FLESH AND BLOOD**
Jonathan Karsh directed this documentary about a California woman, Susan Tom, who takes care of eleven adopted special-needs children and her own emotionally disturbed teen-age son. Opening Nov. 28. (Angelika Film Center.)

**TIMELINE**
An adaptation of a Michael Crichton thriller about a group of archeological students who become trapped in fourteenth-century France. With Paul Walker and Frances O'Connor. Directed by Richard Donner. Opening Nov. 26.

**THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE**
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Nov. 26. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

## FILM NOTES

**THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS**
Rémy (Rémy Girard), the plumply boisterous philanderer of Denys Arcand's 1986 film, "The Decline of the American Empire," is now in his early fifties and dying of cancer in a Quebec hospital. His investment-banker son, Sébastien (Stéphane Rousseau)—a svelte, devastatingly efficient young man who disapproves of his reprobate father—shows up from London, arranges for Rémy's comfort as best he can, and reassembles the gang of gabby intellectuals who were Rémy's friends and colleagues in the earlier movie. The hospital room becomes the site of an ongoing party: sexual memories, bawdy jokes, political tirades, and regrets bang off the walls at all hours. Eventually, the entire group relocates to a house on the same lake that was the setting for "Decline"; as Rémy grapples with his failures and satisfactions, the movie shuts up and calms down. Arcand's film might be called an idyll of death, and the concluding scenes, in which Rémy tries to pass something on to the next generation, are intensely moving. In French.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/24/03.) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)



**FOR A FEW DOLLARS MORE**
When Sergio Leone fabricated the Old West on location in Spain, he performed a sort of reverse plastic surgery on the face of mythical America, adding scars, stubble, and terrifying expressions of emptiness. The spaghetti Western existed before Leone, but he popularized it internationally with three gleefully rabid adventures that turned a TV actor named Clint Eastwood into a movie star. Leone, who once referred to Eastwood as "a mask of wax," dressed him in a poncho, stuck a cheroot between his lips, and came up with an antiheroic icon: the Man with No Name. This middle entry in Leone's Eastwood trilogy co-stars the courtly yet ominous Lee Van Cleef. He and Eastwood play bounty hunters who eventually join forces against a mad-dog bandit chieftain played by Gian Maria Volonte. This may be the best in the series, thanks to its balance of grungy humor and visual virtuosity—and to its perfect payoff sequence. Originally released in 1965.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; Nov. 30-Dec. 2.)

**THE HUMAN STAIN**
Robert Benton, the maker of such muted films as "Nobody's Fool," has now turned his attention to the somewhat louder material of Philip Roth, whose infuriated tale of love in the age of Kenneth Starr was published in 2000. Anthony Hopkins is Coleman Silk, born black, but pale of skin, who, with smarting irony, is hounded from his post as a professor of classics for an allegedly racist remark. His lover, who sweeps floors and milks cows for a living, is played by Nicole Kidman, whose bearing, unfortunately for Benton, becomes more aristocratic with every passing film. The miscasting is completed by Gary Sinise, who takes the part of Nathan Zuckerman, one of Roth's roster of stand-ins. The result is calm, wintry, and plaintive—in other words, a world away from the novel. That is no crime, but Benton's decorous approach leaves the movie floundering in implausibilities. With Wentworth Miller as the younger (and more compelling) Silk.—*Anthony Lane* (11/3/03) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 2, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

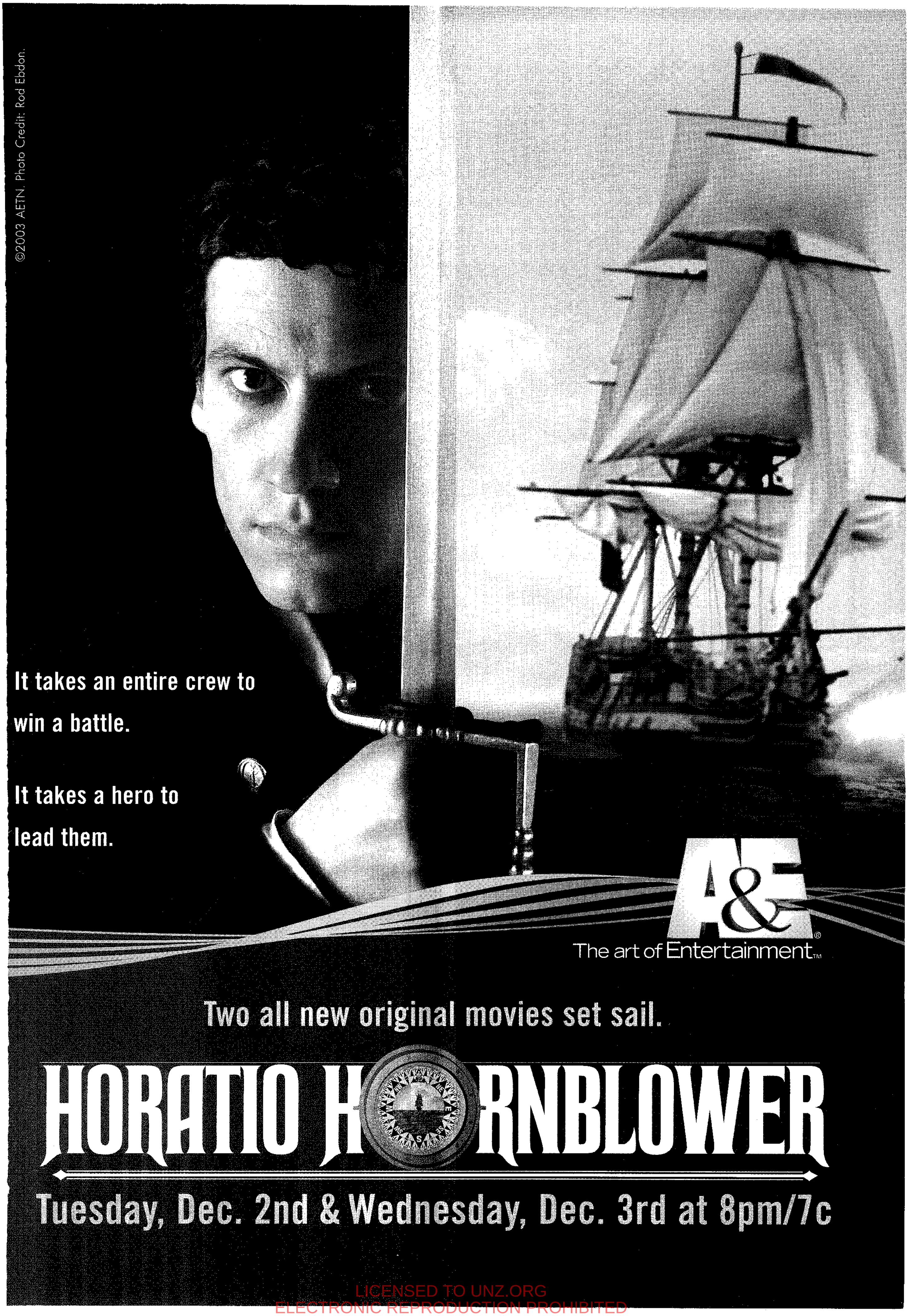
**KILL BILL—VOL. 1**
In this Quentin Tarantino fantasy pastiche of samurai and martial-arts films, the trunk of a body, its head lopped off, will spurt blood like a fountain. We know that the non-stop violence is not meant to be real: for starters, the blood looks like cranberry juice. Yet Tarantino is working in a photographic medium, and the real-world associations are not so easy to shrug off. Tarantino's heroine, Uma Thurman, kills another female warrior in front of the woman's little girl, and the child doesn't react. Tarantino wants the shock of a mother killed in front of her daughter without the audience undergoing any discomfort at all. The movie is what's formally known as decadence and commonly known as crap. Saying that it's an homage to long-established genres in Hong Kong doesn't reduce its pop-nihilistic stupidity. Some of the sequences have a scintillating visual flair, but you come out feeling nothing at all. And this is only the first half.—*D.D.* (10/13/03) (Battery Park 16, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, Sutton 1 and 2, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)

**LOONEY TUNES: BACK IN ACTION**
Don't worry, it's much better than "Space Jam." Joe Dante, a big fan of Chuck Jones and all things Looney, directed this silly adventure that properly places Bugs and Daffy at center stage. For the grownups, he's packed the film with inside jokes that pay homage not just to Warner Bros. cartoons (Speedy Gonzales, alas, is having trouble finding work in these politically correct times) but to all of movie history. For the kids, there's plenty of good old-fashioned mugging and make-believe violence. The human actors, led by Brendan Fraser, blend in well with their animated co-stars, although there's still that nagging problem of eye contact. More troublesome is the pacing: Dante packs the movie with enough clamorous action to tax even the most hyper ten-year-old. Still, a few sequences—like a chase through the paintings at the Louvre—display a surreal creativity worthy of Master Jones himself.—*Michael Agger* (Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 34th Street Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.)

**MASTER AND COMMANDER: THE FAR SIDE OF THE WORLD**
Finally, the work of Patrick O'Brian arrives onscreen. Two of his twenty Jack Aubrey novels have been requisitioned for this new Peter Weir film; instead of receiving a gentle introduction, we are launched straight into a fogbound firefight, and from there into a race around Cape Horn. The casting of Russell Crowe as Aubrey will divide the fans; he can handle the sway of action with aplomb, but O'Brian readers may flinch at his sullen air and pine for the bluffness of the original. Paul Bettany does a delicate job with the role of Stephen Maturin, Jack's best and cleverest friend; we sense his quiet eagerness—common to the work of Weir and O'Brian—to press on toward the darker reaches of the world and discover more. For all the foul weather, and despite the charming amputation scene, we feel ourselves to be in good company with these men, and strangely jealous of their packed and salted lives.—*A.L.* (11/17/03) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

**THE MATRIX REVOLUTIONS**
In the final installment of the "Matrix" trilogy, the directors Larry and Andy Wachowski have made the intricacies of the original movie (the play between actual and simulated reality) secondary to the main events of spectacle, fighting, and stunningly wooden dialogue. At its best, the picture is violently exciting; at its worst, banal and monotonous. More than ever, the plot's conventional science-fiction elements (man vs. machine) are in the foreground. The movie may best be described as an enormously sophisticated version of the 1953 George Pal classic, "The War of the Worlds." Serious fans—call them Matricians—will spend hours debating the apocalypse as revealed by the Brothers Wachowski. But if you ignore the wilder speculative meanings inspired by the series, there remains a halfway palpable idea: in a period in which gigantic corporations and entire governments devote themselves to promoting made-up realities, people may genuinely wonder what world they are living in. With Keanu Reeves, Hugo Weaving, Carrie-Anne Moss, Laurence Fishburne, Jada Pinkett Smith, and Cornel West.—*D.D.* (11/10/03) (Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea West, Cinema 3, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

**MY ARCHITECT**
A traditional quest, superbly told. Nathaniel Kahn seeks to understand the life of his father, the architect Louis I. Kahn, a task made even more difficult by the fact that Kahn had three separate and



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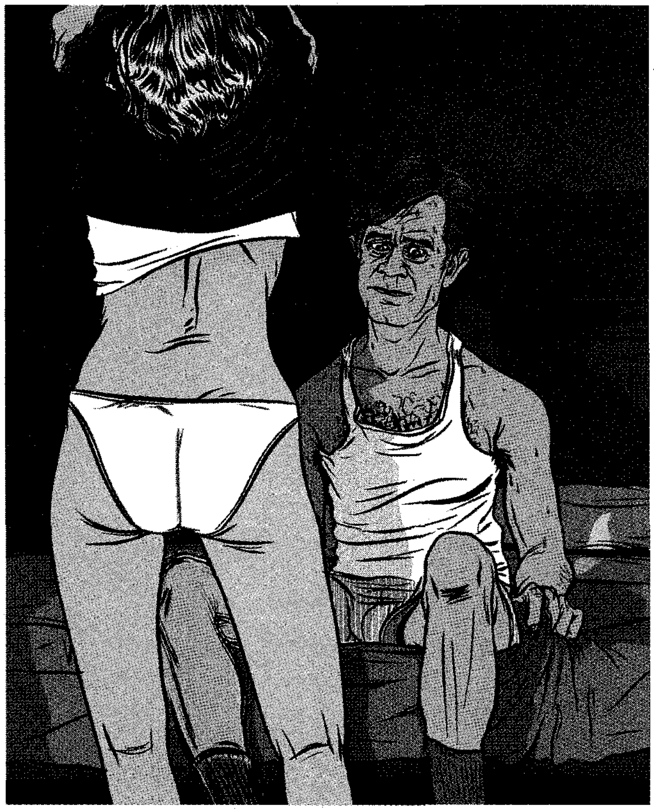
coexisting families: a wife and two mistresses with one child apiece. For his part, Nathaniel was an illegitimate son and only eleven when his father died; his interviews are laced with raw, uncut feeling for a man he never really knew. Throughout the documentary, he uses Kahn's buildings (beautifully photographed) as a kind of wedge into his father's motivations and personality. He discovers that Kahn's more famous contemporaries, like I. M. Pei, appear haunted by his career: is it better to have designed three or four unexampled buildings, as Kahn did, or to have had a successful, high-profile architectural practice? Perhaps more surprisingly, the women in Kahn's life don't regret the way he treated them. Anne Tyng, Kahn's co-worker and mistress, explains her affection this way: "The ideas that you work on together connect you always somehow." In the end, Nathaniel's homage to his father demonstrates what it was like to be caught in his creative whirlwind.—*M.A.* (Film Forum.)

### MYSTIC RIVER

Clint Eastwood's sombre masterpiece, from a novel by Dennis Lehane (Brian Helgeland did the adaptation), is about a working-class Catholic community in Boston held in thrall by an old crime. Back in the seventies, one of three eleven-year-old boys who were close friends was taken away by two men pretending to be cops and sexually assaulted for days before he finally escaped. But it turns out that Dave (Tim Robbins) never escaped at all. Twenty-five years later, he is still shrouded in dreams and terror, and his two friends, Sean (Kevin Bacon), a homicide detective, and Jimmy (Sean Penn), an ex-con who runs a corner grocery, still feel the shame of not helping him. When Jimmy's nineteen-year-old daughter is murdered, the three are uneasily brought back together again. The movie's feeling for the neighborhood milieu is so convincing because there's no distinction between background and foreground—everything we see (faces, living rooms, back yards, weather, battered old cars) is dramatically relevant. Eastwood directs in a gray, end-of-day light and with a minimum of camera rhetoric; he lets the script and the actors do the work. Penn does a few semi-psychotic soliloquies in which he takes off into the stratosphere, joining Marlon Brando as one of the great tragic actors of the screen.—*D.D.* (10/13/03) (Battery Park 16, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.)



*Maria Bello and William H. Macy in "The Cooler."*

### PIECES OF APRIL

Katie Holmes continues to distance herself from her "Dawson's Creek" past, in this sensitive drama written and directed by Peter Hedges. The apple-cheeked actress surrounds her eyes with mascara and slumps her shoulders as April, a rebellious daughter living a shabby-chic life style on the Lower East Side. Her transformation works, for the most part, but the movie's real center of gravity is Patricia Clarkson, as April's mother, suffering from breast cancer. It's a challenging role; Hedges wrote the character as someone who can no longer tolerate sympathy, and Clarkson manages to express vulnerability along with the dry, caustic wit of a woman who has made her reckoning with death. The movie has April reuniting with her mother for Thanksgiving, but it's not a depressing or cheaply sentimental story. With Oliver Platt, Alison Pill, Alice Drummond, and Derek Luke lending fine support as family and boyfriend. Shot on digital video, in a style that is sometimes claustrophobic.—*M.A.* (Lincoln Square and Sunshine Cinema.)

### SCHOOL OF ROCK

Fans of Jack Black, your cup runneth over. He plays Dewey Finn, a mediocre but enthusiastic guitarist who bluffs his way into a substitute-teaching position at an exclusive private elementary school. At first, the job is purgatory, but then it's paradise: some of the fifth graders turn out to be skilled classical musicians, and soon Black begins instructing them in the finer points of power chords. The movie nostalgically celebrates the liberating power of classic rock—the way it could impart coolness to all true believers. The kids are cute, and their acting, for better or worse, belongs to the amateurish tradition of "The Bad News Bears." Mike White's somewhat (for him) generic script sets the stage for Black to cut loose. The actor has a knack for moving his body in funny ways, and he sings and prances for the camera in a risky and aerobic performance. Joan Cusack offers fine support as the tightly wound principal. Richard Linklater directed, with his trademark touch of conveying milieu.—*M.A.* (42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

### SHATTERED GLASS

If you are searching for the definitive illustration of a tempest in a teacup, look no further. The writer and director Billy Ray has filmed the story of Stephen Glass, the young reporter who forged facts in a string of pieces that he wrote for *The New Republic* in the late nineteen-nineties. Glass is expertly played by Hayden Christensen as a puppyish geek, digging himself into ever deeper holes. Glass's editors at the time were Michael Kelly (Hank Azaria), who was fired in the midst of the Glass farrago, and then Chuck Lane (Peter Sarsgaard), who fired Glass himself. Insiders may lap this stuff up, but visitors from the outside world will wonder what the fuss is about, and the movie is scripted, shot, and scored with such undying solemnity that fits of shameful giggles may be heard in cinemas across the land. With Chloë Sevigny, naturally, as one of Glass's fellow-reporters.—*A.L.* (11/3/03) (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

### THE STATION AGENT

The writer and director Tom McCarthy has turned his attention to a New Jersey backwater and come up with something lyrical, taciturn, and stripped of sentimentality. Peter Dinklage plays Fin, a dwarf who inherits a cabinlike home beside a railroad track in Newfoundland, in Morris County. Fin loves trains and not much else—hardly surprising, given that the world has shown him little more than a laugh and a sneer—and he is none too thrilled when his quiet space is invaded. Over time, though, he warms to the invaders: Joe (Bobby Cannavale), loud and lonely, who sells coffee and hot dogs from a neighboring van, and Olivia (Patricia Clarkson), a painter, still mourning the loss of a young son. The three of them fall in with one another, then fall out, then gradually fall back in; like some of the best short stories, the picture evades grandeur, mature enough to linger on what nearly happens. None of the central performers put a foot wrong, and McCarthy takes care not to insist that small is beautiful; rather, he and Dinklage leave us reflecting that small can be angry, tired, and tough.—*A.L.* (10/6/03) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

### SYLVIA

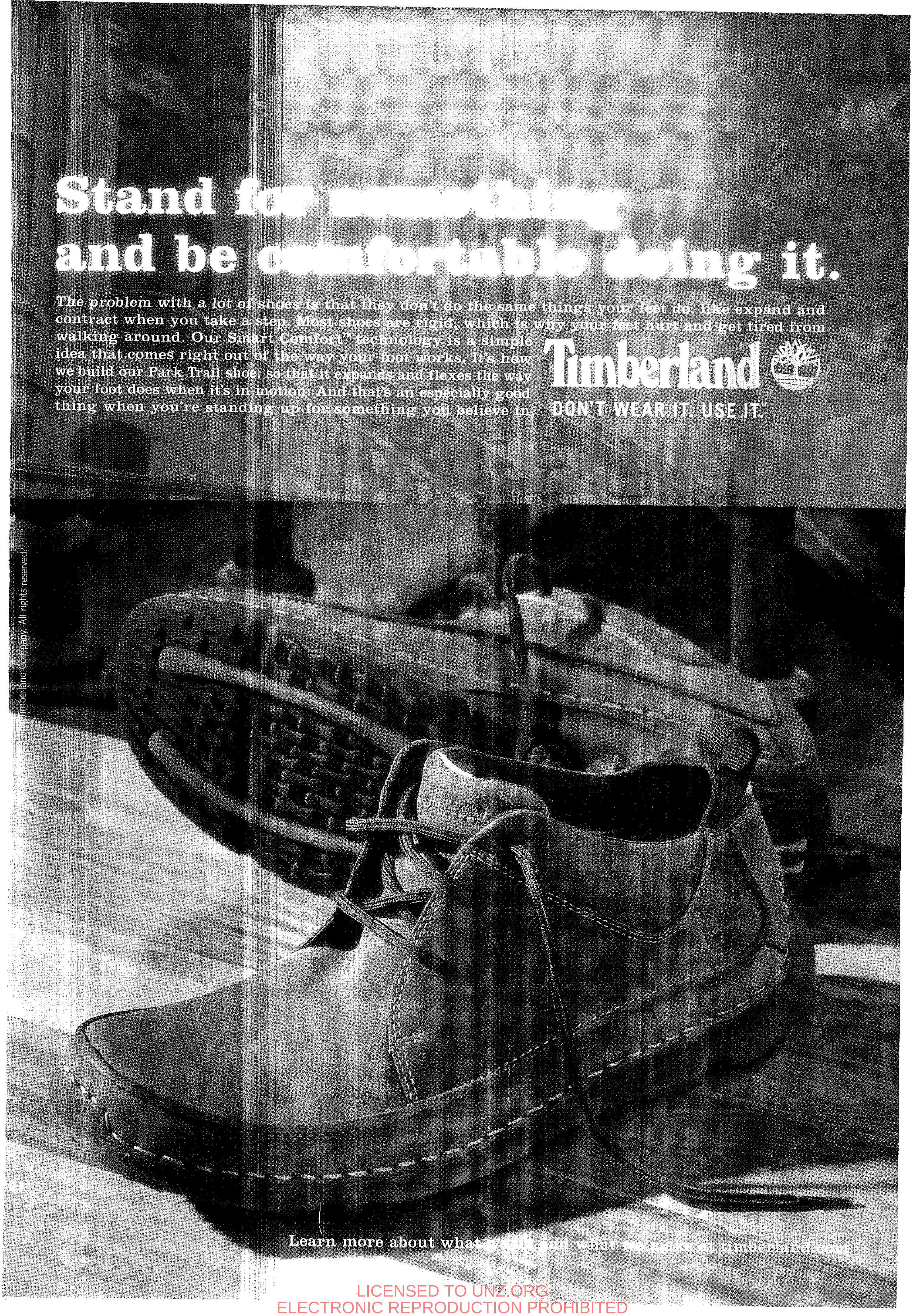
If Mel Brooks had got his hands on the story of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath, we could have been treated to a chorus line of suicidal poets chanting "It's a gas!" As it is, we must make do with this bleak account of intertwining lives. Plath (Gwyneth Paltrow) meets Ted Hughes (Daniel Craig) in 1956 and marries him shortly afterward, to the polite consternation of her mother (Blythe Danner). The action switches from a morose England to a bright and bracing America, then back again; the second half of the picture leads us through the plunging of Plath's moods, the publication of her poems, and her death, in 1963. The screenwriter, John Brownlow, and the director, Christine Jeffs, handle this material with patience and tact, and Paltrow is unafraid to show the sour and simmering side of her heroine. We come away convinced of the poets' shared intensity, and deeply relieved that we are able to observe it from a safe distance.—*A.L.* (10/20/03) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

### 21 GRAMS

Impassioned and affecting as some of it is, this desperately sincere drama of life and death in Nowheresville, U.S.A., is also an arrogant failure. Benicio Del Toro, dolorously made up with clown circles under his eyes, plays the Jesus-freak ex-con who accidentally runs down a man and his two little girls. Sean Penn, some sort of math professor with a bad ticker, gets the heart of the dead man, at which point he begins to follow around the grieving widow (Naomi Watts). Written by Guillermo Arriaga and directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu, the same team responsible for the powerful "Amores Perros," the picture moves every which way but straight ahead. The intent of the scrambled syntax, one imagines, is to show how three sensitive and damaged people might encroach upon one another's lives, even infiltrate one another's unconscious, a process that works independently of time. But we don't know where we are in the story or why a given action should matter. The jagged pieces of the mosaic keep dropping off the wall and falling to the floor with a clatter. Yet the three stars act the hell out of their tormented roles, and, at times, they are amazing to watch.—*D.D.* (11/24/03) (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, and Village Theatre VII.)

### WINDOW TO PARIS

This Russian comedy, a smash on its home turf in 1993, follows a fired St. Petersburg music teacher (Sergei Dontsov) through a magical space portal to Paris. He discovers that the decadence of France's established consumer paradise can be as jolting as the birth pangs of Russia's new capitalist society, and that a lovely, pretentious taxidermist (Agnes Soral) can succumb to soulful Slavic charm. The heavy-handed caricatures of contemporary Russia's hunger for wealth and the City of Light's jadedness—at one point the hero lands a job playing Mozart without trousers—deflate the buoyant



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whimsy of the concept. The best moments depict him playing Pied Piper to his students, who react with a jig-like march that might have emerged from some world-culture edition of "Fame." In Russian.—*M.S.* (Walter Reade Theatre; Dec. 1-2.)

## ALSO PLAYING

**THE CAT IN THE HAT**
Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

**ELEPHANT** (10/27/03)
Angelika Film Center and BAM Rose Cinemas.

**ELF**
Battery Park 16, Cinema 1, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.

**LOST IN TRANSLATION** (9/15/03)
BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Quad Cinema, and Village Theatre VII.

**LOVE ACTUALLY**
Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, 72nd Street East, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.

**TO BE AND TO HAVE** (9/29/03)
Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

**I VITELLONI**
Cinema Village.

## THEATRE ADDRESSES

*Unless noted, call 212-777-FILM for show times.*

**Angelika Film Center,** 18 W. Houston St.
**Astor Plaza,** 44th St. at Broadway.
**Battery Park 16,** West St. at Vesey St.
**Beekman,** Second Ave. at 66th St.
**Chelsea Cinemas,** 260 W. 23rd St.
**Chelsea West,** 333 W. 23rd St.
**Cinemas 1, 2, and 3,** Third Ave. at 60th St.
**Cinema Village,** 22 E. 12th St. (212-924-3363).
**East 86th Street Cinemas,** Third Ave. at 86th St.
**84th Street Sixplex,** Broadway at 84th St.
**Empire 25,** on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (212-398-3939).
**59th Street East Cinema,** 239 E. 59th St.
**First & 62nd Cinemas,** 400 E. 62nd St.
**42nd Street E Walk,** 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
**Kips Bay Theatre,** Second Ave. at 32nd St.
**Lincoln Plaza Cinemas,** Broadway at 63rd St. (212-757-2280).
**Lincoln Square,** Broadway at 68th St.
**New York Twin,** Second Ave. at 66th St.
**19th Street East 6,** Broadway at 19th St.
**Orpheum VII,** Third Ave. at 86th St.
**Paris,** 4 W. 58th St. (212-688-3800).
**Quad Cinema,** 34 W. 13th St.
**72nd Street East,** Third Ave. at 71st St.
**64th and 2nd,** Second Ave. at 64th St.
**62nd & Broadway,** 62 W. 62nd St.
**Sunshine Cinema,** 139-143 E. Houston St.
**Sutton 1 and 2,** Third Ave. at 57th St.
**34th Street Theatre,** 312 W. 34th St.
**Union Square,** Broadway at 13th St.
**Village East Cinemas,** Second Ave. at 12th St.
**Village Theatre VII,** Third Ave. at 11th St.
**Ziegfeld,** 141 W. 54th St.

## REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

*Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.*

**AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE**
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Fist and Sword: Martial Arts Classics." Nov. 28 at 7:30: "Sword of Doom" (1966, Kihachi Okamoto; in Japanese). ♦ Through Dec. 14: A Francis Ford Coppola retrospective. Nov. 29 at 1: "Faerie Tale Theatre: 'Rip Van Winkle' " (1985). ♦ Nov. 29-30 at 2: "The Outsiders" (1983). ♦ Nov. 29-30 at 4: "Rumble Fish" (1983). ♦ Nov. 29-30 at 6:30: "The Godfather Part II" (1974).

**ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES**
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5110)—The Third Annual Harry Smith Memorial Celebration. Nov. 26 at 7:30: "No. 12: Heaven and Earth Magic" (1957-62). ♦ Nov. 29 at 5:30: Short works (1941-67). ♦ Nov. 28-Dec. 10: The African Diaspora Film Festival. For the complete schedule, see http://www.nyadff.org.

**BAM ROSE CINEMAS**
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Selections from the New Festival. Nov. 26 at 4:30 and 9:10: Short films. ♦ Nov. 26 at 7: "Suddenly" (2002, Diego Lerman; in Spanish). ♦ Two by George Cukor. Nov. 27-28 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Adam's Rib" (1949). ♦ Nov. 29-30 at 2, 5:15, and 8:30: "My Fair Lady" (1964). ♦ "History as Nightmare: The 60s." Dec. 1 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10: "Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid" (1973, Sam Peckinpah). ♦ Dec. 2 at 7:30: The films of Boris Barnet. "The House on Trubnaya Square" (1928; silent).

**FILM FORUM**
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—Through Dec. 4: Sergio Leone films. Nov. 26-27 at 2, 5:30, and 8:30: "Duck, You Sucker" (1972). ♦ Nov. 28-29 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30 and Nov. 30 at 4:20: "A Fistful of Dollars" (1964). ♦ Nov. 30 at 1 and 8:50: "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" (1966). ♦ Nov. 30 at 6:20 and Dec. 1-2 at 1:30, 4, 6:30, and 9: "For a Few Dollars More" (†).

**FLORENCE GOULD HALL**
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Dec. 23: "Petits Bijoux," underappreciated French films. Dec. 2 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Dossier 51" (1978, Michel Deville; in French).

**GRAMERCY THEATRE**
127 E. 23rd St. (212-777-4900)—Through Nov. 30: "Global Lens: New Cinema from the Developing World." Nov. 28 at 4: "Shadow Kill" (2002, Adoor Gopalakrishnan; in Malayam). ♦ Nov. 28 at 6: "Margarette's Feast" (2002, Renato Falcão; in Portuguese). ♦ Nov. 29 at 4: "Women's Prison" (2002, Manijeh Hekmat; in Farsi). ♦ Nov. 29 at 9: "Rachida" (2002, Yamina Bachir-Chouikh; in Arabic). ♦ Nov. 30 at 2: "Angel on the Right" (2002, Djamshed Usmonov; in Tajik). ♦ Nov. 30 at 4: "Nothing" (2001, Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti; in Spanish). ♦ Through Jan. 31: "Margarethe Von Trotta and New German Cinema." All films are in German. Nov. 28 at 2 and Dec. 1 at 6: "The Serbian Girl" (1991, Peter Sehr). ♦ Nov. 28 at 8 and Nov. 29 at 1: "Germany, Pale Mother" (1980, Helma Sanders-Brahms). ♦ Nov. 29 at 6:15: "Rosa Luxemberg" (1985, Von Trotta). ♦ Nov. 30 at 6: "Sisters, or the Balance of Happiness" (1979, Von Trotta). ♦ Dec. 1 at 8: "Freak Orlando" (1981, Ulrike Ottinger).

**GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM**
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—Through Jan. 14: A Federico Fellini retrospective. All films are in Italian. Nov. 26 at 7: "Juliet of the Spirits" (1965).

**SUNSHINE CINEMA**
139-143 E. Houston St. (212-358-0573)—Midnight movies. Nov. 26-29: "The Big Lebowski" (1998, Joel Coen).

**THALIA THEATRE**
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—An Akira Kurosawa retrospective. All films are in Japanese. Nov. 29 at 3 and Nov. 30 at 7:30: "The Bad Sleep Well" (1960). ♦ Nov. 29 at 6:30 and Nov. 30 at 3: "Rashomon" (1950). ♦ Nov. 29 at 8:15 and Nov. 30 at 4:45: "Throne of Blood" (1957).

**WALTER READE THEATRE**
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—Through Dec. 4: "Another Russia: A Tribute to Lenfilm Studios." All films are in Russian. Nov. 26 at 1, 4:30, and 8: "In That Land" (1997, Lidiya Bobrova). ♦ Nov. 26 at 3 and 6:30: "Saint's Day" (1989, Sergei Selyanov and Nikolai Makarov). ♦ Nov. 27 at 3 and 7:30: "Peter the Great (Parts One and Two)" (1937-38, Vladimir Petrov). ♦ Nov. 28 at 1, 5, and 9: "Torpedo Carriers" (1944, Semyon Arañovich). ♦ Nov. 28 at 3 and 7 and Nov. 29 at 5:30: "The Lady with the Little Dog" (1959, Iosef Heifits). ♦ Nov. 29 at 1 and 3:30: "The New Babylon" (1929, Grigory Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg). ♦ Nov. 30 at 2, 4, 6, and 8: "Russian Ark" (2002, Alexander Sokurov). ♦ Dec. 1 at 2 and 6:15 and Dec. 2 at 2:45: "Window to Paris" (†). ♦ Dec. 1 at 4:20 and 8:45 and Dec. 2 at 1: "Kseniya, Beloved Wife of Feodor" (1974, Vitaly Melnikov).

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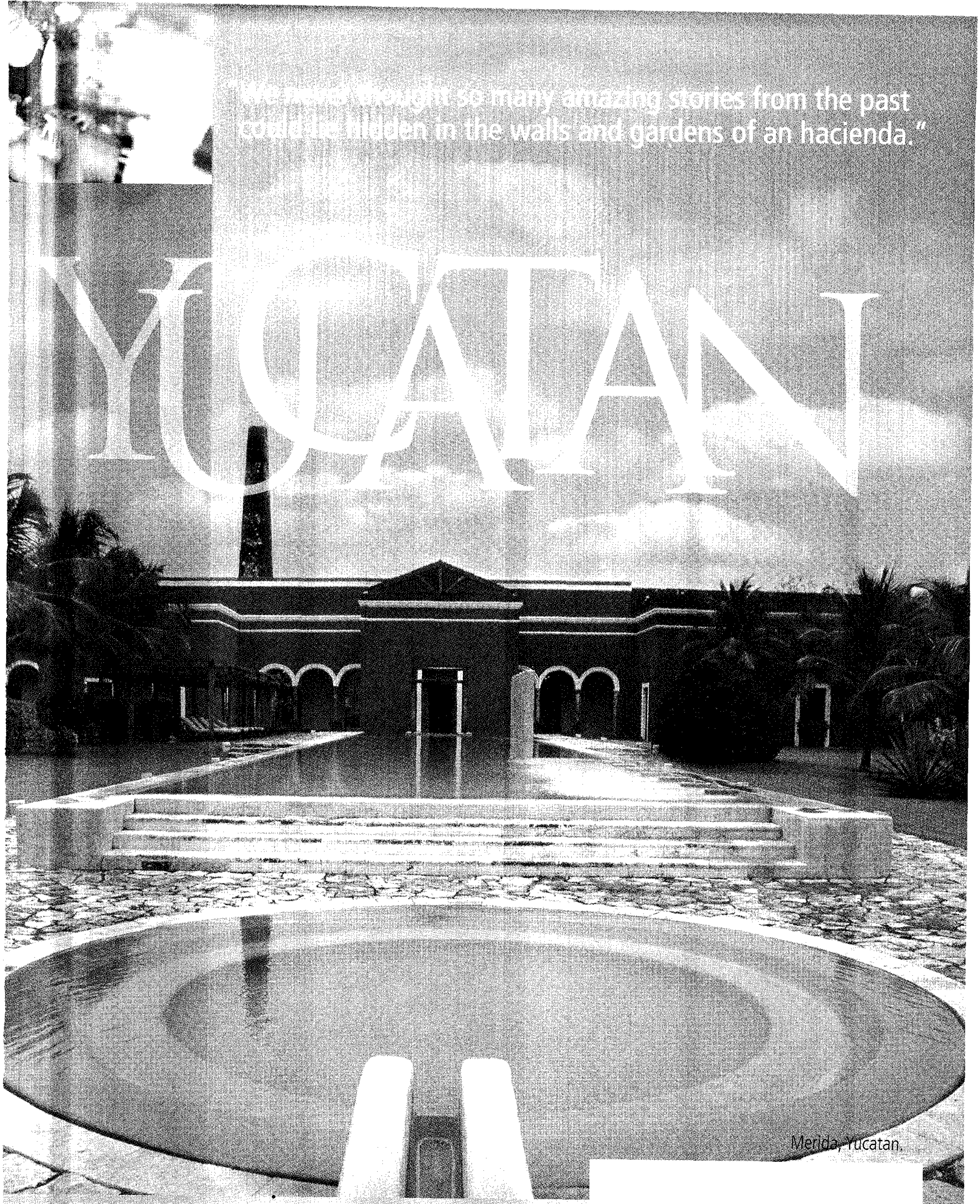
*Opening November 28, "Hukkle," an experimental Hungarian murder mystery.*

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM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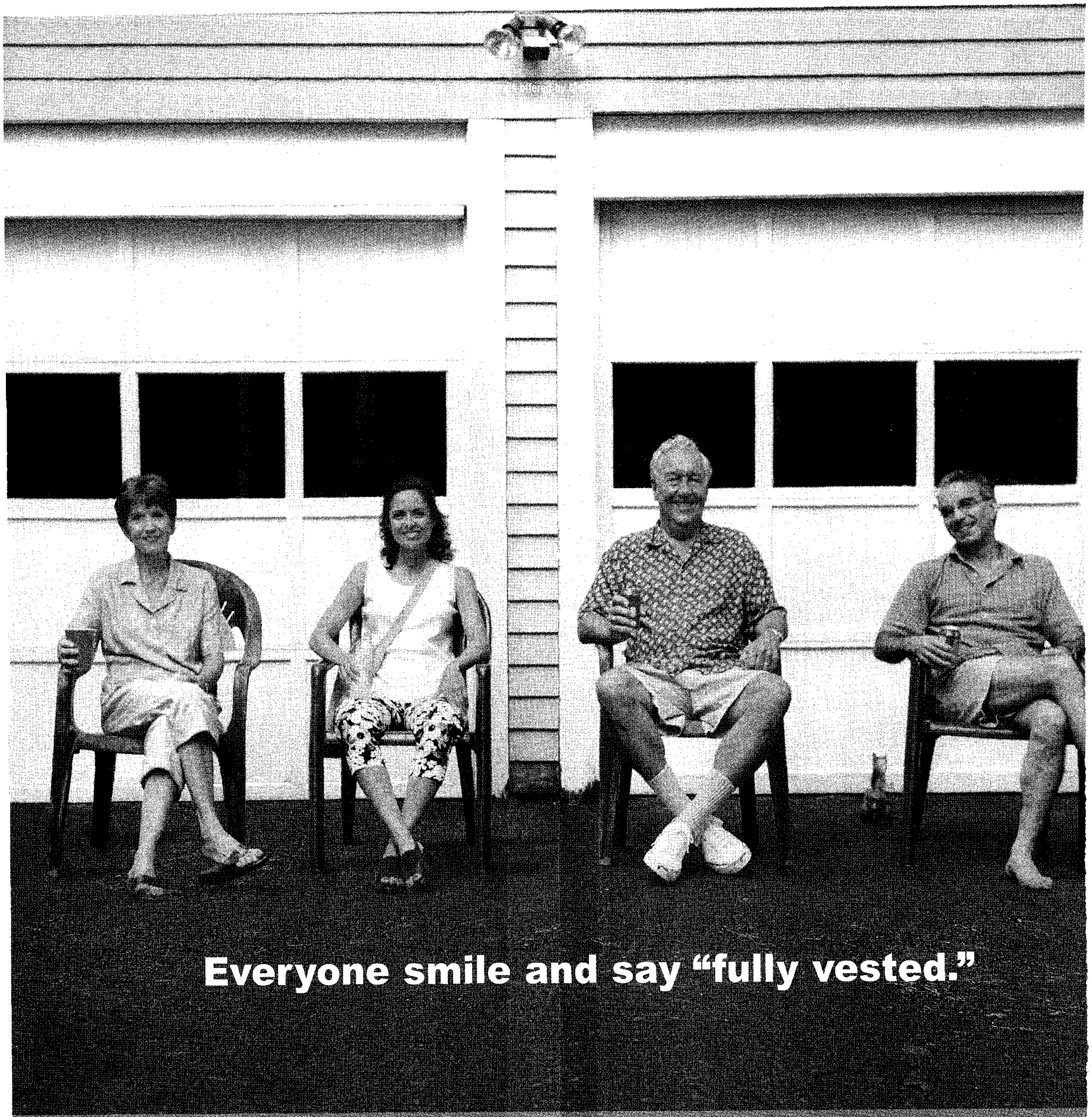Everyone smile and say "fully vested."

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THE
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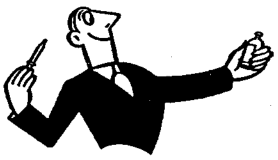
# THE TALK OF THE TOWN

## COMMENT
## INSTITUTIONAL HEALTH

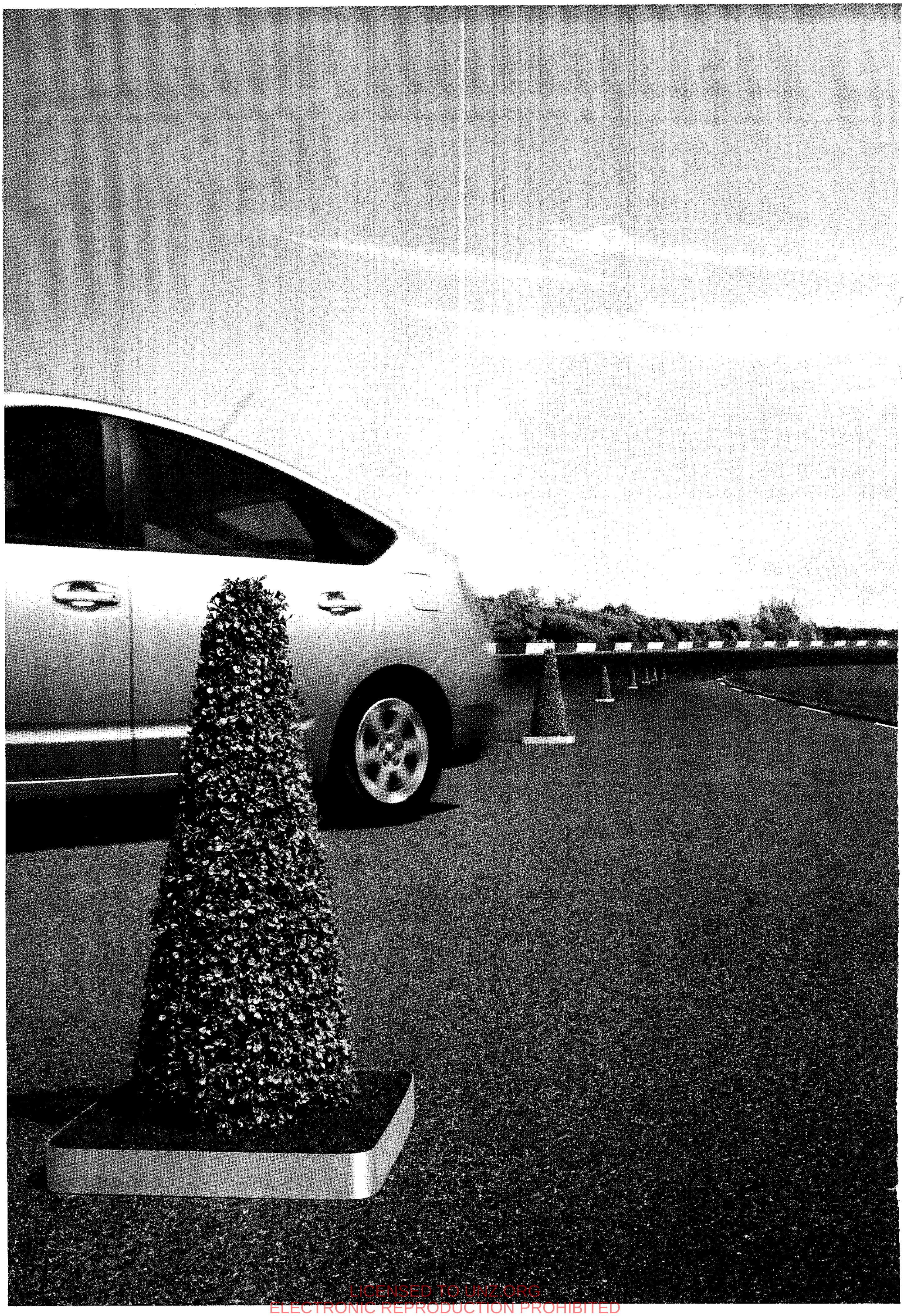


Several months ago, an anonymous track-and-field coach sent a vial of clear liquid to the drug-testing laboratory at U.C.L.A. Inside the vial, the coach said, was one of the sporting world's dirty little secrets—and, sure enough, after months of chemical analysis the lab found an anabolic steroid called tetrahydrogestrinone, or THG, which had been cleverly engineered to evade standard drug testing. Since then, the governing bodies of the sports world have been going back and, one by one, re-analyzing the urine samples they have on file—and discovering that some athletes they thought were clean are not. Last week, the scandal spread to professional football. According to news reports, at least four members of the Oakland Raiders—Dana Stubblefield, Chris Cooper, Barret Robbins, and Bill Romanowski—tested positive for THG. The Raiders' coach, Bill Callahan, faced reporters and admitted that the controversy had left his team shaken. The media were barred from the Raiders' locker room. The Players' Union huddled with league officials to discuss what was fair punishment and what was not. All in all, it was a week of long faces and sombre talk, as the league struggled with the question of how to best protect the health of its athletes.

Then, in the midst of this, the N.F.L. released its weekly update of players currently suffering from football-related injuries. The list was two hundred and forty-seven names long. Here, for example, are the Washington Redskin players identified (in one of the N.F.L.'s many wonderfully economical euphemisms) as "probable" for the next game, meaning, by football standards, that their injuries are not considered serious enough to keep them off the field:

> LB LaVar Arrington (knee/hand); CB Champ Bailey (wrist/shoulder); S Matt Brown (concussion); WR Laveranues Coles (toe); RB Bryan Johnson (concussion); DE Bruce Smith (hand/knee); CB Fred Smoot (chest).

It is always useful—and occasionally entertaining—to try and unravel the philosophical convolutions of America's attitude toward drugs. (One wonders, for instance, how long it will take the Bush Administration's drug czar to call for random testing of the country's conservative-talk-show hosts.) But the N.F.L.'s bluster over THG, it must be said, is in a class by itself. Over the past few years, a number of epidemiological studies have made it clear that playing in the N.F.L. is a uniquely hazardous activity. N.F.L. linemen are half again as likely to suffer from heart disease as the average American male, and almost half of them suffer from skeletal ailments—not to mention elevated rates of arthritis, obesity, depression, and post-concussive disorder. The human body is simply not built to be thrown repeatedly onto concrete-hard playing fields, at top speed, by helmet-wearing, muscle-bound three-hundred-pound giants. But that's not what the N.F.L. was wringing its hands about last week—it was too busy warning players against defiling the temple that is their body with an unapproved pharmaceutical. In the circumstances, it's not hard to understand why the Players' Union was moved to respond with the ridiculous argument that, since THG wasn't on the list of banned substances when the season began, it was unfair to penalize players after the fact for having taken it—even though, of course, the reason THG wasn't on the list of banned substances was that it had been engineered not to be on the list of banned



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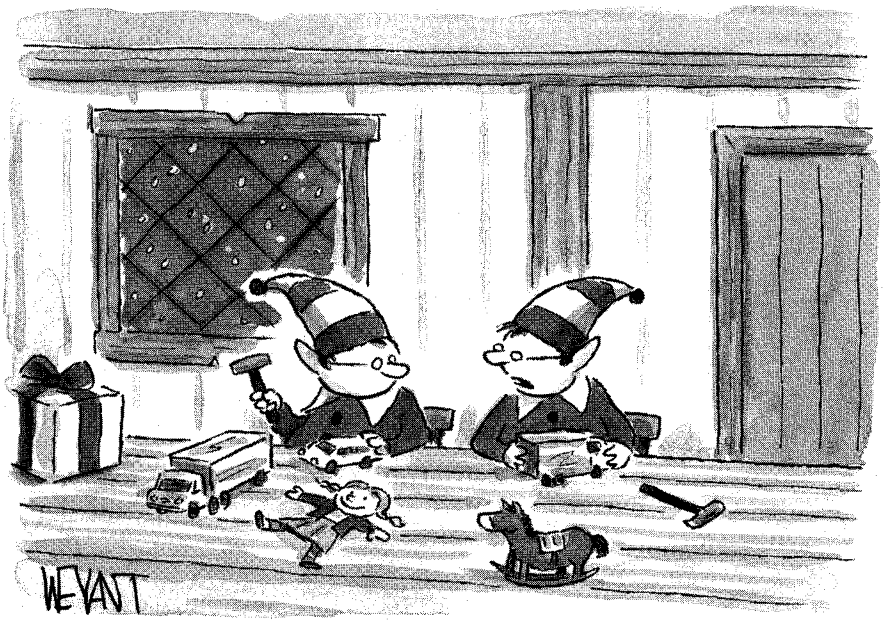
substances. In football, this is called playing down to the level of your opponent.

Despite the N.F.L.'s claims that it is concerned about the health of the players, it is more concerned about the health of the N.F.L. Football's governors make a distinction between natural violence and artificially aided violence, and it's their contention that the former has a good deal more market appeal than the latter, in the same way that consumers are believed to be willing to pay more for pure orange juice than they are for the adulterated version. What the N.F.L. really cares about is the institution of football. That is the reason players, when they are not smashing into each other on the field, have to behave like Rotarians, and dress up nicely in suits, and visit sick children in the hospital, and not smoke marijuana. The idea is that there is some abstract thing out there called "football" that is bigger than them and will long outlive them all, and that it needs to be nourished and protected with socially appropriate behavior.

If this argument sounds familiar, it is because the idea that institutions—and not the constituents of institutions—need our support is very much in vogue right now. The case against affirmative action, for instance, has become an argument in defense of the institution of higher learning—which is, apparently, so fragile that it will crumble in the face of a few sub-par test scores. The same logic was at work last week in President Bush's response to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court's ruling that gay couples have the right to marry. "Marriage is a sacred institution between a man and a woman," he said. There's that word again, and notice how the sentence doesn't quite make sense. It should read: "a sacred *bond* between a man and a woman." But the President had to say "institution," because nobody imagines that the court's decision will actually jeopardize the personal bond between any particular man and any particular woman. Notice, as well, that neither the President nor the N.F.L. bothered much with the principles involved in these causes. That is why the N.F.L., in its statements about the health of its players, had to obscure the fact that there isn't any appreciable ethical distinction between the profound physical harm caused to football players by playing football and the harm caused to football players by taking drugs. Massachusetts officials, for their part, in criticizing the court's decision, maintained that the purpose of marriage was procreation, that children were better off in male-female unions, and that gay unions would pose a burden to the state. None of those arguments are derived from principle; they are arguments of expediency. They are appeals to the institution of marriage, and institutions—on and off the football field—are where we hide when we can't find our principles.

—*Malcolm Gladwell*



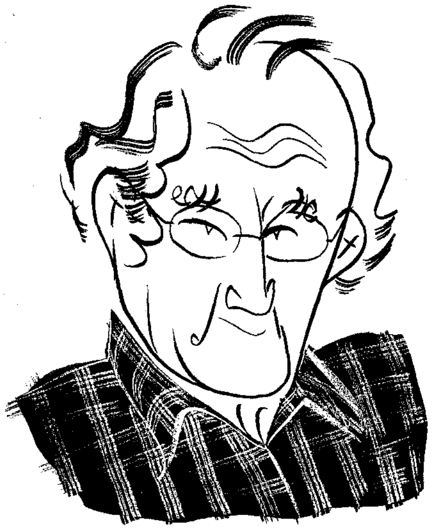
*"Still, this beats my old job working at Wal-Mart."*

## VERMONT POSTCARD
## THE LIGHT OF SUNDAY

The Reverend William Sloane Coffin, now seventy-nine and suffering from terminal heart disease, no longer preaches on Sundays, but he can't stifle the urge to prepare new material for what might as well be called impromptu sermons—at banquets and award ceremonies (increasing numbers of which are held in his honor these days), or whenever someone happens to drop by and express an interest. ("I'd like to think I could view all people as potential converts," he has said.) He keeps a stack of spiral-bound notebooks handy for jotting down interesting quotes and facts that he comes across while reading, for eventual incorporation into what he calls his ministry of "eclectic scholarship." Recent entries include the phrase "trickle-down nuclearism," from Robert Jay Lifton's new book, "Superpower Syndrome"; a description of President Bush as being "too intellectually insecure . . . so he retreats into the cocoon of the like-minded," from a *Times* column by David Brooks; and James Carroll's characterization of Jerusalem as the epicenter of "God-sponsored violence."

Politics and religion have never been far apart in the preachings and doings of Bill Coffin. As the chaplain at Yale, in the sixties, he was jailed for his activities as a Freedom Rider in Montgomery, and then tried, as a member of the Boston Five, for conspiracy to resist the Vietnam draft. Later, as the head of Manhattan's Riverside Church, he ministered to the American hostages in Iran, and advocated AIDS awareness in the epidemic's early years. According to Coffin, the faith's two Biblical mandates are not preserving the sanctity of life and stamping out sin, as Jerry Falwell might have it, but, rather, the pursuit of justice and the search for peace. His new book, "Credo," which is made up of excerpts culled from a lifetime of sermons and speeches, amounts to a spiritual denunciation of modern American government. So it was not surprising, the other day, to hear Coffin sounding off on Iraq.

"Anybody sitting in distant Vermont knew perfectly well that, just as Yugoslavia was threatened with chaos after Tito, in Iraq after Saddam Hussein you'd have Kurds in the north, Shiites in the south, and the Sunnis in the middle," he said. "And now we're going to form a democratic government?" Coffin was sitting at his kitchen table, with flies buzzing around him, in distant Vermont—Strafford, a village of about a thousand. There was snow in the yard. "It's Sunday—I guess I'm getting worked up," he said. "These guys, don't they know anything about history? Poor old Woodrow Wilson said, 'We're ending World War I—we're going to make the world safe for democracy.' As a result, we opened all kinds of doors to every kind of dictator, from Atatürk all the way to Salazar, and in between Franco, Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin." Coffin's wife, Randy, stoked the fire in the living room. Their Dalmatian sat quietly nearby, seeming almost to listen. "If you know your New Testament, you know it was the Devil who tempted Jesus with unparalleled power and wealth," he continued. "Well, that's something to think about for a superpower."



*William Sloane Coffin*

Norman Mailer once described Coffin's voice as equal parts union organizer and Ivy League crew coach. He speaks more deliberately now, struggling to pronounce certain words—the result of a stroke suffered in 1999. Once an aspiring concert pianist, he has enormous hands, which he uses to punctuate his speech and, occasionally, to cover his face, as though particularly struck by the words he is about to utter. He is not, as is often assumed, a pacifist. He supported the initial strikes on Afghanistan, albeit with trepidation. But he admires the sense in which, as he put it, "an honorable pacifism recognizes that the mystery of evil is beyond its solution.

"Nothing is more dangerous than misunderstanding evil," Coffin continued. "Evil has an irremediable stubbornness about it. And it must be recognized, it has to be constrained, but it can never be resolved." His right hand briefly obscured his face, and then he resumed. "St. Augustine said, 'Yea, my pride-swollen face has closed up my eyes.' He also said, 'Never fight evil as if it were something that arose totally outside of yourself.' And that's what's so pernicious, so dangerous about Bush—that he just doesn't understand the stubbornness of evil, and he just doesn't understand American complicity." (Coffin's own "axis of evil" consists of "environmental degradation, pandemic poverty, and a world awash with weapons.")

Coffin can no longer leave home—a modest white house facing the town green—without a wheelchair, so he tends not to stray far. As summer turns to fall, he watches wild turkeys roam his back yard, and the colors change in such a way that "Moses wouldn't know which bush to turn aside," he said. "Nature gets more interesting as you get nearer to joining it." When winter closes in, he watches football.

As a self-described "yellow-dog Democrat," Coffin offered his opinions on the Presidential campaign. Wesley Clark, he said, "might be a highly intelligent General Haig, or he might be a good leader of the Party. I don't know." John Kerry, meanwhile, "has a face that looks as though it could be moved right up on Mt. Rushmore without going through the White House." He smiled mischievously. "Joe Lieberman heard that I'm not supposed to last very long, so he called me. In his pious tone, Joe started to say how much I had meant to him. I cut him off. 'Joe, I would give my right arm to have the influence on you now that I had then. You're an Orthodox Jew and a conservative Democrat. It'd be better if you were the other way around—a conservative Jew and an orthodox Democrat!" Coffin is a Howard Dean man.

His primary aim in publishing "Credo," he said, was to teach believers how to be proper patriots. "As Americans, we should love America, but pledge allegiance to the earth, to the flora and fauna and human rights," he said.

"The book gives me a sense of completion," he went on, his eyes following the dog around the room. "As old Hamlet said, 'The readiness is all.' I think I'm pretty ready." He laughed. "I feel strongly that Oliver Wendell Holmes was right. Not to share in the activity and passion of your time is to count as not having lived. I don't claim virtue. I claim a low level of boredom."

It was almost time to retire to his bedroom to watch some more football. That night, the New England Patriots were playing the Dallas Cowboys. "Parcells is an absolutely extraordinary coach," he said, "but we shall see. I'm for the Patriots."

*—Ben McGrath*

## YESTERDAY'S PAPERS
## *TIMES* WARP

Irving Tobin reads at red lights. He reads in the dentist's chair. At dinner parties when he finds the company boring, he tries to read at the table. Several years ago, Irving's wife, Phyllis, came into the bedroom as he was getting dressed. She found him reading the paper, one leg suspended in the air, as he was pulling on a sock.

Tobin reads the *Times* every day, struggling to find the two and a half hours necessary to get through it. He keeps stacks of newspapers in the front seat of his car and in spare cupboards, in case he finds himself without a paper in hand.

Tobin is behind in his *Times* reading. One year, five months, and four days behind, which places him in late June, 2002. In his daily paper, the United States has not yet invaded Iraq, the D.C. sniper hasn't fired a shot, and Gray Davis is secure in Sacramento.

Tobin grew up in Elizabeth, New

Jersey, and still lives there, in a four-bedroom house on a quiet tree-lined street. Seventy-nine years old, he works most days at his law firm, a few minutes away. When he was younger, he worked as an accountant on the side. That's how the trouble started. When he met Phyllis, in 1975, he read *Time,* the Elizabeth *Daily Journal*, and the Newark *Star-Ledger*. She introduced him to the *Times*. Soon he had to cut out his other reading. Then tax season came along. Every year, he fell behind, losing almost two months in March and April.

"I realize I'm not going to catch up, but I like to believe I will," he said the other day. When the *Times* went on strike in 1978, he lagged by only nine days. By 1998, he was almost two years behind, even though he had quit reading the Sports section years before. "I just had to give up something," he said. He also skips Escapes and Circuits.

Saturday is Tobin's biggest reading day—he gets in about four hours, two before synagogue and two after lunch. "I make slight advances, but they're very, very slight," he said. He keeps up with current events by listening to the radio while he drives to work. If he thinks he might be about to learn the ending to a particular story he's following, he will turn it off. He doesn't want to spoil the suspense.

In the upstairs hallway of the Tobins' house, two bookcases are stacked high with yellowing newspapers. The piles are organized by month, each day's paper divided into its sections. There are more papers in the bedroom: Tobin opened a tall cabinet next to his bed and revealed a stack that extends from floor to ceiling. In the breakfast room, a small pile on a chair waited to be sorted.

Downstairs, in the living room, his wife's library fills a long wall. "With a book, we not only read it—we have to keep it forever, as a souvenir," he said, plucking out a long-undisturbed copy of "In Cold Blood." "I try to retain information in my mind, not on a shelf. When I'm done with the paper, I throw it away."

Phyllis Tobin, a clinical psychologist with practices in Manhattan and Elizabeth, prefers not to diagnose her husband's habit. "Irving's the smartest guy I ever knew in my life," she said. A few weeks ago, she lost a silver earring on the subway tracks. When she got home, she told her husband about it. The following weekend, he happened to read an old *Times* article that included instructions for retrieving items lost in the subway. He clipped it for Phyllis, and she followed the article's advice. Two days later, she had her earring back.

—*Alicia DeSantis*

## THE HIGH LIFE
## CAIRO FRED

Omar Sharif—Cairo Fred to his friends—has played a bandit and a Catholic priest and Khalil Gibran and Tsar Nicholas II and the British agent Cedric, who gets trash-compacted in "Top Secret!" He is seventy-one. He has wide-set, glistening eyes the color of caviar, though the comparison might not impress him: "Caviar—for me it's like eating beans." His hair resembles a mold of white-truffle mousse ("In my hotel"—the Royal Monceau, where he lives, in Paris—"I eat white truffles every night"). His brows are still black. He doesn't wear makeup, cologne, or aftershave—"never in my life." He is fearsome: "I have flown *millions* of miles, *millions*, in first class—L.A.-Paris, L.A.-New York, China, Egypt, Argentina, Argentina, Argentina—and never gotten a single free mile." (Sputter, fist slam, hiccup.) "I will take all the airlines down. I will hold a press conference with all the journalists in the world! It's not the money, it's the principle!"

If you're not careful, he's apt to turn on you. Recently, he spent a night in jail after assaulting a policeman who tried to escort him from the roulette table where he'd lost more than thirty thousand dollars on one bet. "It made me the hero of the whole of France. To head-butt a cop is the dream of every Frenchman." Catherine Mareska, his assistant of thirty-five years, has a long-suffering look. "It was a Saturday," she said wearily, about having to fetch him from jail. (Sharif is an expert bridge player, and he has amassed enormous gambling debts over the years.)

The other night, he was eating dinner at "21." The maître d' greeted him familiarly, and then steered him to a table and chose a seat for him. "I want to show you to Walter Cronkite," the maître d' said, tilting his head at an adjacent group of diners.

"How sweet," Sharif said, smiling to show the gap between his front teeth.

A waiter who said that he was Turkish brought the first course. "My wife is Egyptian," he said.

"She makes love pretty good, right?"

"The most loyal woman in the world."

"She looks after you. Look how you look—like a baby."

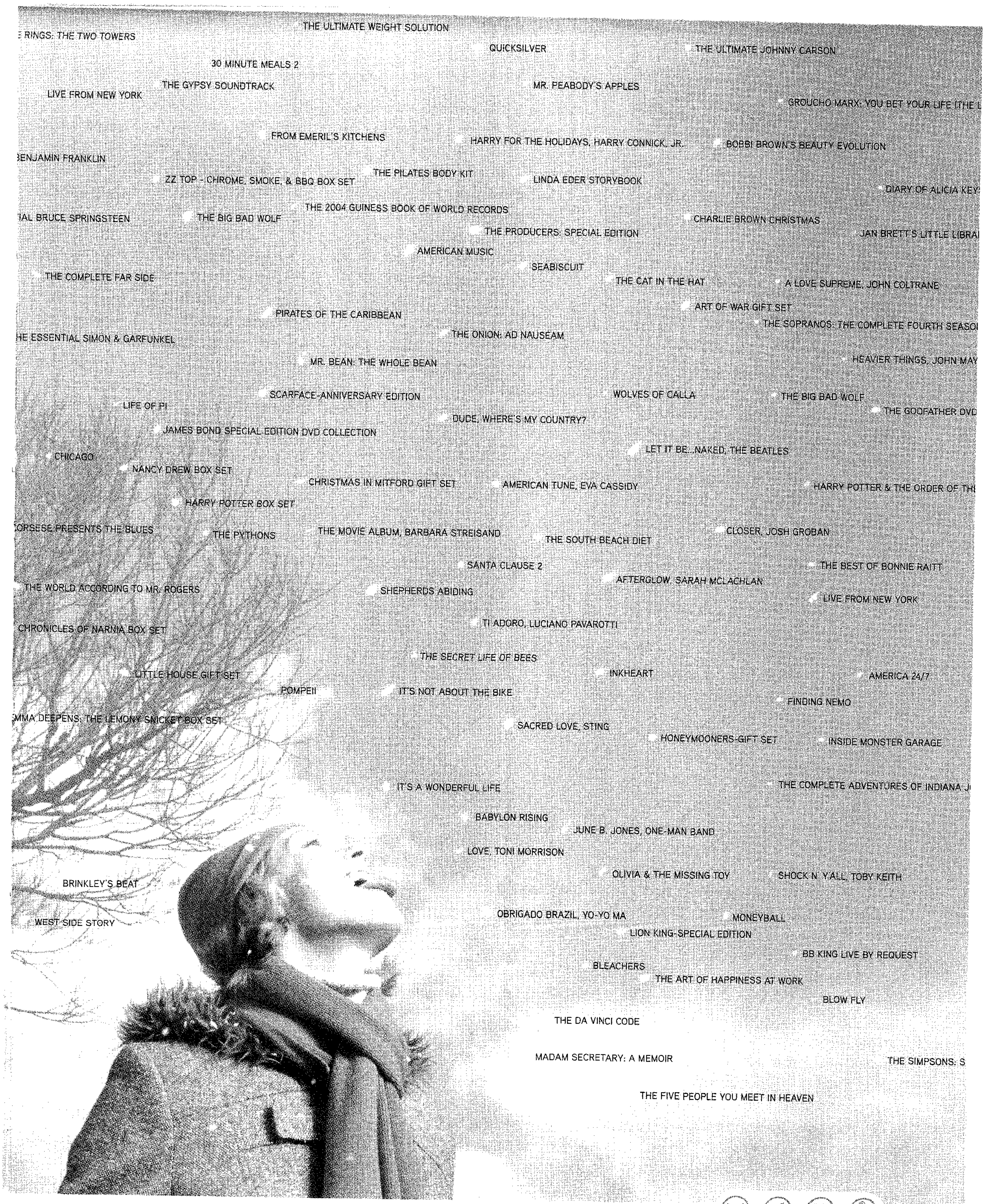
"I'm not joking. She still never ceases to amaze me."

"Ask her if she has a sister for me."

Sharif's latest role is in a French movie called "Monsieur Ibrahim," which is set in Paris in the nineteen-sixties. He plays an aging Sufi shopkeeper who befriends Momo, a lonely Jewish boy, and convincingly imparts such lessons as "What you give is yours forever. What you keep is lost for all time." M. Ibrahim has a close and mystical relationship to a higher power; Sharif's is more mystifying. "I always kind of resented the fact that I was born into a rather wealthy family and was extremely good-looking," he said. "Why should God make me handsome and rich and be in front of all the temptations in the world? You know, they said in the Bible it's more difficult for a rich man to enter Paradise than for a camel to enter in the hole of a needle. Well, why does he discriminate against me?" Still, God has come through for him. He allowed Sharif, who smoked a hundred cigarettes a day for forty years, to live through the night once when he had chest pains (he was in Budapest, filming an Angela Lansbury movie, "Mrs. 'Arris Goes to Paris"), and so he quit smoking altogether. "I never spoke to him again," he said. "Because I thought, I'm not going to break his balls every minute, asking him for a favor—'Make my horse win the third race at Yonkers.' I said, 'I've got something there. I'll save it till I really need something big.' "

Sharif took a sip of wine. "Ecstasy," he said. "I believe that I will go to Paradise, if it exists. I never lie, I never kill, I never do anything *really* bad. I am very charitable. I spread my money everywhere, I throw it like this—when I have it." His next role will be in a movie of the epic Gilgamesh, in which he plays the richest man in town.

—*Dana Goodyear*



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# THE FINANCIAL PAGE
# GET SHORTY

A few years ago, the Finance Ministry of Malaysia suggested that a certain group of troublemakers needed to be punished. Caning, the Ministry said, would be the right penalty. And who were the malefactors being threatened with the rap of rattan? They weren't drug dealers or corrupt executives or even gum chewers. They were short sellers.

Short sellers are investors who sell assets (a company's shares, say) that they have borrowed, in the hope that the price will fall; if it does, they can buy the shares at a lower price, return them to the trader they borrowed them from, and pocket the difference. In effect, they are betting against a company's stock price. As a result, they have, historically, been regarded with great suspicion, and though the Malaysian proposal was novel, the hostility behind it was not. Shorts have been reviled since at least the seventeenth century. Napoleon deemed the short seller "an enemy of the state." England outlawed shorting for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Just last year, Germany's Finance Minister suggested that short selling should be banned during crises. Across the world, short sellers continue to be seen as conniving sharpies, spreading false rumors and victimizing innocent companies with what House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert once called "blatant thuggery."

The United States, it's true, hasn't resorted to the rattan, but it still enforces a set of rules against short selling that have been in place since the thirties, when shorts were seen as a cause of the Great Crash. In a country as optimistic and can-do as ours, there seems to be something un-American about betting against stocks. That may be changing. The Securities and Exchange Commission is now proposing an eighteen-month experiment in which the most onerous restrictions on short selling would be lifted for three hundred big stocks. If the market for these stocks worked well, the old rules could eventually be lifted across the board. And it's about time.

"It's easy to make short sellers wear the black hats," James Chanos, the head of Kynikos Associates and one of the few pure short sellers around, says. "Short selling is always an emotional issue. Executives have their egos tied to the price of their shares, so when you take a position against them they take it personally." But give the short sellers their due: they're the canaries in the coal mine, recognizing problems before others do. In the past few years alone, shorts sounded early alarms about blow-ups like Enron, Tyco, and Boston Chicken; they also uncovered scams at lots of smaller companies that tried to cash in on the stock-market hysteria of the late nineties. In general, the companies that short sellers target deserve it. The economist Owen Lamont studied a group of companies that had clashed with short sellers—denouncing them in conference calls with investors, imploring shareholders not to lend them stock, and so forth. He found that the average stock-market return for these companies over the next three years was minus forty-two per cent, which suggests that their stock prices were as inflated as the shorts had claimed.

Even when short sellers aren't uncovering malfeasance, their presence in the market is useful. If you think of a stock price as a weighted average of the expectations of investors, restrictions on short selling skew that average by shutting out people with contrary opinions. It's a bit like setting a point spread for a football game by allowing people to bet only on one side. When a team of Yale management professors did a study of forty-seven stock markets around the world, they found that markets with active short sellers reacted to information more quickly and set prices more accurately. A traditional justification for short-selling regulations—including the rule the S.E.C. wants to repeal, which prevents short selling when prices are already falling—is that they protect markets from panics. Yet the study found no evidence of it. There's a case to be made that in the late nineties restrictions on short selling helped inflate the Internet bubble, by reducing any counterweight to the prevailing mania. This, in turn, worsened the eventual crash.

If the S.E.C. does run its experiment, corporations are hardly going to drown in a deluge of short sales. Today, only two per cent of all United States stock-market shares are shorted, and even with looser restrictions short selling is likely to remain uncommon. In part, that's because shorting stocks is simply harder than buying stocks: loans can be called in at any moment, and your potential losses are unlimited. More important, shorting demands a willingness to challenge Wall Street's foundational dogma: that stocks should, and will, go up.

"I used to think that it should be as easy to go short as it is to go long," Chanos, who was one of the first to see through Enron's hype, says. "After all, the two things seem to require the same skill set: you're evaluating whether a company's stock price reflects its fundamental value. But now I think that they aren't the same at all. Very few human beings perform well in an environment of negative reinforcement, and if you're a short, negative reinforcement is what you get all the time. When we come in every day, we know that Wall Street and the news and ten thousand public-relations departments are going to be telling us that we're idiots. You don't have that steady drumbeat of support behind you that you have if you're buying stocks. You have a steady drumbeat on your head." By lifting the regulatory sanctions on short selling, the S.E.C. might help to weaken the social sanctions. The result should be a better functioning market, which is in the interest of investors as a whole. Let corporations denounce short sellers all they want. The case against these bears is a lot of bull.

—*James Surowiecki*

**Trevor Harris,** Head of Global Valuation and Accounting Policy
Equity Research

# Yawn or Yell?

## What to do about pesky pension liabilities.

Pension deficits keep growing, and funding is rapidly becoming necessary. In a continuing low-growth environment, investors cannot ignore the impact of pension obligations on earnings, cash flow and capital. But the market still seems to struggle with the economic realities surrounding the issue.

**A dangerous combination of falling equity returns and interest (discount) rates has led to a drastic increase in pension shortfalls.** We estimate the aggregate deficit for defined benefit pension plans was around $220 billion for companies in the S&P 500 at the end of fiscal 2002, up from around zero a year earlier. In the first six months of 2003, the estimated deficit rose by over $100 billion, to $340 billion, despite strong equity markets. A similar trend occurred in the UK, with deficits growing from nothing in 2001 to an almost £80 billion shortfall in early 2003.

**Will a bull market save the day?** Many companies' managements and investors believe that the deficits can be filled by an inevitable improvement in equity returns as the economy recovers. While this is plausible for some, we think it is a very remote possibility for most companies. Our work shows that the combined levels of returns and interest rates required are just too high. *Bottom line*: if companies believe interest rates are rising and equity markets are headed up, now is a good time to fund their pension deficits.

**A small deficit is not a sure sign of safety.** The key is its size relative to the company's market capitalization. For most companies, the ratio is relatively low, and these companies can and should be filling deficits with contributions. If the ratio is high, any "misses" in plan returns or in meeting future funding needs must be managed carefully, and companies may face cash funding calls and/or debt or equity issuance to fill the hole. A company's ability to manage this depends on free cash flow generation and the market's willingness to provide funding.

**Current US administration proposals do not change the economics.** The administration's proposal to change the discount rate for Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) funding purposes raises two questions: would this help companies avoid early payments? And would it change the deficits? Our answer to both questions is, "Not really."

**The pension deficit problem is worth yelling about for a small number of companies globally.** For most other companies, the issue is manageable so long as they do not let accounting or actuarial fictions delude them into a world of hope and inaction. They should not let their funded status deteriorate; be realistic about the risk profile of their pension assets; understand the size and distribution over time of their cash obligations; and, most importantly, should not wait too long to fund shortfalls — so that they fund from strength, not weakness.

Trevor Harris
*Head of Global Valuation and Accounting Policy*
*Equity Research*

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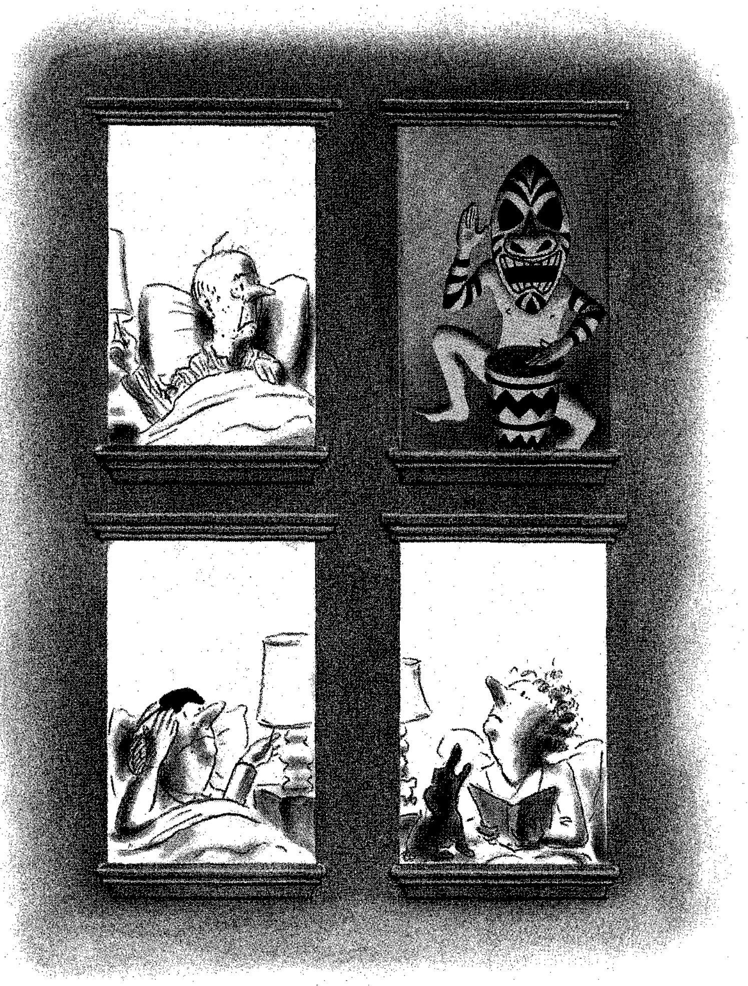
OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

# THE NOISES

*What was going on in the apartment upstairs?*

BY NICK PAUMGARTEN



The Walters first began hearing the noises three years ago, at around eleven in the evening, as they were getting ready for bed. "Thuds, bangs," Richard Walter recalled recently. "Like someone whacking the floor with a two-by-four." This was joined, in the following nights, by another sound: "A buzzing. Like a loud bee noise. *Zzzzzz.* It was more or less constant, sometimes until two or three in the morning." The noises seemed to be coming from the apartment directly overhead and were as hard to account for as they were to sleep through. Night after night, the Walters lay awake, wondering and seething.

Richard Walter, who is eighty-one, and his wife, Linda, who is a little younger than that (they've been married for thirty-five years), sleep in separate bedrooms in apartment 6D at 1016 Fifth Avenue, an elegant limestone-and-brick prewar building that faces the Metropolitan Museum of Art, along one of the most expensive strips of real estate in New York. In broker's parlance, the apartment is a classic six, with a living room, a dining room, two bedrooms, and what's known as a maid's room—a small bedroom off the kitchen. If you wanted to buy the place, you would probably have to come up with two or three million dollars. You would also have to be approved by the board, because 1016 Fifth is a coöperative, or co-op, which means, among other things, that the people who live in it, or their representatives on the board of directors, can reject a buyer for almost any reason, or for no reason at all. The Walters breezed through the process five years ago. Richard, who grew up on Long Island and served as a lieutenant in the Navy during the Second World War, was on the verge of retiring from his business of importing craft items (lace from Scotland, appliqués from Taiwan), and he had some money, which is what co-op boards like most.

It says something about neighborliness in the more rarefied Zip Codes that the Walters knew next to nothing about whoever occupied the apartment upstairs. Happily, doormen tend not to be nearly as discreet as their livery suggests, and so in the course of elevator rides and lobby chats the Walters were able to glean a few things. The owner of the apartment was a woman named Rise Dimson, who had been in the building since 1994. She was divorced, and she owned a home-furnishings boutique (porcelain *sake* sets, live finches) on East Sixty-seventh Street. She apparently had a boyfriend, who had recently moved in with her. He was an artist. There were reports of renovations, of a bedroom being converted into a studio. "I'm the kind of man who hears the word 'artist' and thinks brushes and paint," Richard Walter said. "I pictured Picasso up there, or Jackson Pollock." Then Linda got a tip from a source in a neighbor's book club that the artist was in fact a jeweller. The Walters began to imagine noisy, alchemical procedures involving hammers and chisels and molten gold. "Mr. Walter," a doorman told Richard, "your days of quiet are over."

Quiet, of course, is relative, especially in New York. The covenant of quiet enjoyment—the principle that allows apartment dwellers, stacked like trays of honeybees, to expect a bit of peace—can be an exasperating abstraction. Anyone who has spent some years living in the city has a noise story to tell. Either the neighbor is noisy or the neighbor is crazy. Bedsprings, headboards, blenders, bocce balls, laugh tracks, Marv Albert, Mozart. Some people can live with it and some cannot, and often those who cannot are hard to live with, too. David Pullman, a financier who helped popularize what are known as Bowie bonds, spent years complaining, to his neighbors and, eventually,

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the courts, about a couple making noise in the apartment above his in a Central Park West co-op. He claimed that they were running a bookbinding business out of their home. They claimed that he was a quarrelsome pest. The verdict, reached by the other residents one evening at a meeting in a basement laundry room: pest. And so the co-op board kicked Pullman out of the building. The response may have been novel, but the sentiment was not. According to a 1946 report in the *Times*, a Miss Julia Koenigsberg, of East Sixth Street, had a brother who had been complaining to her neighbor about noise. Eventually, Miss Koenigsberg was stabbed to death with a kitchen knife. The neighbor, Mrs. Julia Koukanek, was arrested and charged with the murder. Miss Koenigsberg, the article noted, had also been "beaten on the head with a bunch of keys."

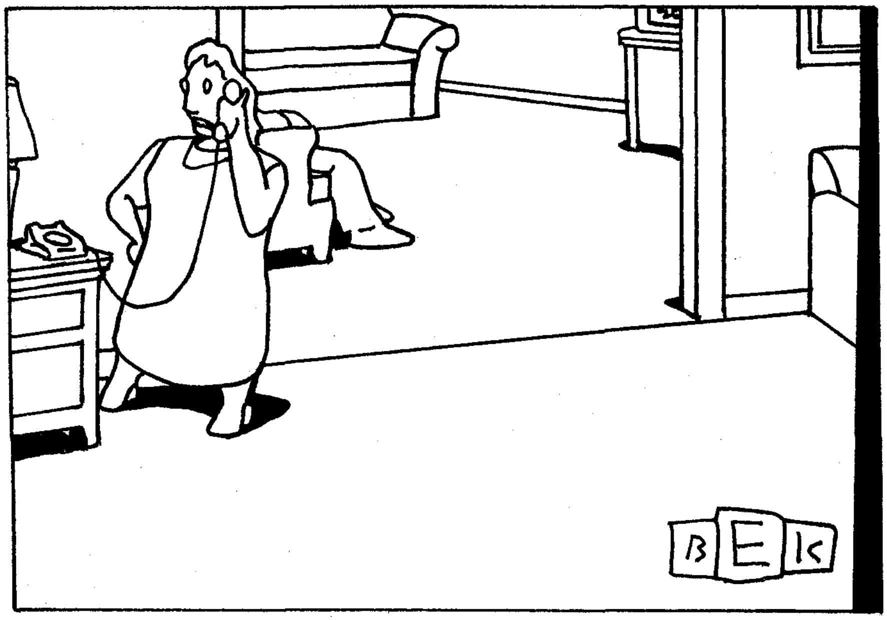
Still, people have a right to what passes for quiet. Co-ops, like prep-school dormitories, have house rules: at 1016 Fifth, children are not allowed in the service elevator, servants are not allowed in the passenger elevator, and "no lessee shall make or permit any disturbing noises." As far as the Walters were concerned, doing whatever it was the boyfriend-jeweller was doing, ten feet above their beds, seemed to violate not only the rules but also their conviction that a building as expensive and well appointed as theirs—with a grand marble lobby, vault-thick walls and floors, and nineteen employees, each eligible for a Christmas envelope full of twenty-dollar bills—ought to be, at the very least, a place where one could expect a good night's sleep.

"I live at 1016 Fifth Avenue," Linda Walter told me, "and I have a *stonecutter* over my head."

When I went to see the Walters on a muggy night last summer, all was quiet, except for the whirr of their air-conditioners and the occasional moan of a bus headed down Fifth Avenue. In the Walters' relatively short time there, the apartment, which was decorated with old globes and paintings of nineteenth-century sailing ships, had achieved the genteel bedragglement familiar to apartment hunters and veterans of doctors' waiting rooms—worn carpets, old photographs of children with bowl haircuts. By the front door, there was an umbrella stand containing wooden walking sticks.

In the living room, Richard and Linda recited their grievances. Richard is sturdily built, and the bemused expression that normally commands the muscles of his face—like that of someone trying to smile through a scolding—can switch quickly to irritation. Linda, who was wearing a long skirt and sandals, has mid-length blond hair and a worried look about her eyes.

"He's working twelve, one, two, three o'clock in the morning," Richard said. "He works all night and sleeps all day."



*"He spends all day sitting, so the last thing he wants to do when he comes home is do anything else."*

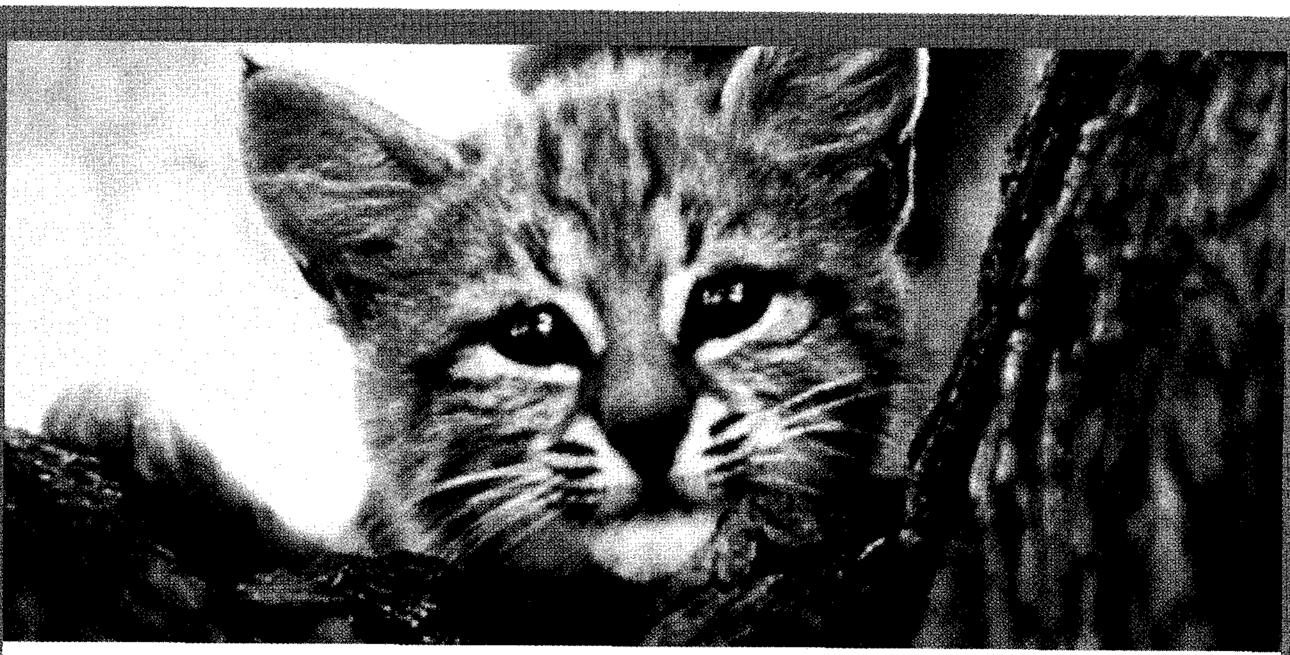
"He's a strange man," Linda said, ominously.

Richard had a page of notes, to which he referred often, as though the events he was describing weren't something he'd spoken about many times before. He had other grievances with the co-op board members. Several of them were fighting the expansion of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, even though the Park views of only a few people—including the board president—would be affected. Also, there had been a flood in the basement recently, with water rising into the storage bins. The board, he was saying, didn't seem to have its priorities straight.

As for the noises, the first person the Walters complained to, reasonably enough, was Rise Dimson. Richard called her during the day, at her boutique. The exchange, tempered by daylight, was cordial. She apologized for the disturbance and said that she'd take care of the noises, whatever they were.

After a few more nights, the Walters rode the elevator to the basement and tracked down the superintendent, Declan Hennessy. "You look tired, Mrs. Walter," the super said. They described the noises and begged him to do something, but, Richard Walter recalls, "he just looked at us." Following several more requests from the Walters, Hennessy agreed to perform a drop test. The super stood in 6D, and another employee went up to 7D and dropped objects on the floor. It was determined that extra carpeting might help. Nonetheless, Hennessy suggested to the Walters that what they were hearing might be the clanking of the radiators.

For the doormen on the graveyard shift, the calls from 6D kept coming, sometimes several in a night. (Once when the Walters rang down to complain, Dimson and her boyfriend weren't home.) Before long, the Walters were summoning the police; cops showed up at Dimson's door half a dozen times. One evening, Linda, in tears, went to the station house on East Sixty-seventh Street, where an officer told her, "You gotta get a lawyer." Eventually, Dimson retaliated: the Walters were banging on the ceiling with a broomstick (on other occasions, they had cranked loud marching music), so she called the cops. Dimson also paid a visit of her own to the police station, in an attempt to get a restraining order against



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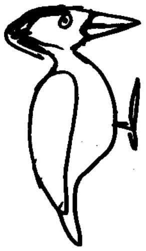
the Walters. Not possible, she was told.

A virtue of a co-op is that there is a board to mediate such disputes. In December, 2001, the Walters wrote a letter to the president of the board, and then, when nothing was done, two letters to the building’s managing agent. They also solicited a letter of support from a neighbor across the hall. But the board told the Walters to “work out a resolution directly with [their] neighbors.” (No one on the board would comment for this article.)



One afternoon, Richard Walter encountered the jeweller, outside the building, riding a unicycle. He was a trim man of about forty-five. Pleasantries were skipped. Walter asked him to come by 6D the next day to discuss the noises. The meeting lasted about half an hour. As the Walters recall it, the jeweller suggested that they wear earplugs.

In the spring of 2002, by which point the Walters had all but abandoned their apartment for a second home, on the water in Amagansett, Long Island, a friend of theirs came across an article in *Modern Jeweler* describing the work of John Nels Hatleberg, “the world’s best diamond replicator.” Hatleberg spent months at a time rendering meticulous copies of great diamonds—the Hope, the Incomparable, the Millennium Star, among others—for the owners of those diamonds. His clients, such as De Beers, Harry Winston, the Smithsonian, and the British Natural History Museum, liked to have replicas for display, documentation, or security. The copies, in other words, weren’t for society ladies to wear out at night.

What interested the Walters, though, was the description in *Modern Jeweler* of Hatleberg’s studio: it was in “one of the world’s priciest buildings,” just across from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. “Pride of place in the studio is given to his worktable, a descriptively painted circular table called a baldachino,” the article said. “On it today is his Ultra-Tec cutting machine.” And on an adjoining page was a picture of Hatleberg manipulating a sturdy-looking device. The caption read, “The perfect setting for replication.” Hatleberg was their man, of course, and that was his machine.

Now that the Walters had a better idea of what Hatleberg was doing upstairs, they hired a lawyer, who helped them arrange a special meeting with the co-op board. The meeting took place last January, in a board member’s apartment. The participants sat around the dining-room table, like the heads of the five families in “The Godfather.” The Walters’ lawyer was aggressive, which startled the board. He argued that Hatleberg was running a business out of the apartment and operating what seemed to be industrial machinery in a residential building—in violation of the building’s proprietary lease—and so the noises, if not the noisemaker, should be made to go away. Walter then got up and spoke more plainly: both Dimson and Hatleberg ought to be kicked out. As Walter tells it, some of the board members laughed at him. “To them, this is funny,” he said.

The board’s lawyer responded, two weeks later, in a letter that betrayed no amusement, though it did reflect some skepticism. “The Board is requesting the parties to agree to jointly retain the services of Cerami Consulting Engineers to test the noise level emanating from the equipment allegedly used in Ms. Dimson’s apartment.” Referring to another of the Walters’ concerns, the letter read, “We also reiterate our request that you substantiate your assertion that Mr. Hatleberg’s activities present a risk of fire and explosion.” The board noted that Hatleberg had characterized his work as “fine art,” which would be permitted in a residential building.

The Walters suspected that the engineers would not be able to measure the noises accurately. (Decibel levels can be difficult and expensive to capture, and, as anyone who has ever been kept awake by a leaky faucet knows, they do not necessarily reflect a sound’s sleep-depriving properties.) The Walters also figured that if they did bring in the engineers Hatleberg would be aware of it and would cease making the noises—which, of course, would defeat the purpose of the exercise.

Instead, two months later, in March, 2003, the Walters filed a lawsuit, against Hatleberg, Dimson, and the building. In addition to silence, they asked for twenty-five million dollars in damages. “Plaintiffs’ occupancy, quiet use and enjoyment of Apartment 6D has been interrupted and, for extended periods, denied by vibrations and loud, offensive, and incessant hammering and noises, which continued and continue throughout the day, night and into the early morning hours, emanating from Apartment 7D (collectively, the ‘Noises’).” The suit betrays some of the more necromantic visions that came to the Walters, based on facts they’d seen in *Modern Jeweler:* “Hatleberg also creates body cream and lotions made from crushed pearls. Upon information and belief, the crushing of pearls may be part of the Noises.”

The lawyer for Dimson and Hatleberg responded by threatening to sue the Walters for bringing a frivolous lawsuit. When I talked to Dimson, she explained that she and Hatleberg had done everything they could to accommodate them. They had installed carpeting and padding, she said, and offered to make 7D available to sound engineers. On one occasion they’d even sent the Walters flowers. Now, she said, “I’m terrified of them.”

A week after the Walters’ suit was filed, the judge, Joan Madden, of State Supreme Court in lower Manhattan, told the Walters to hire sound experts to provide evidence of the Noises. Once again, the Walters didn’t think that this would work. So they withdrew the suit.

By this time, Richard Walter had acquired an adviser and ally, his brother-in-law Bob Bernstein, the former chairman and C.E.O. of Random House and the founding chairman of Human Rights Watch—a tenacious fellow. Over the years, this tenacity has been deployed on behalf not just of writers and dissidents but also of co-op residents who have been afflicted by the caprice of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Ten years ago, Bernstein fought the commission over its demand that he replace two windows in the kitchen of his Park Avenue apartment; the windows had been deemed “nonconforming.” “I have spent a large part of my life trying to get governments off people’s backs,” he told the *Times* in 1993. In the end, he got to keep his windows.

When Bernstein, who is eighty, heard about what was happening to the Walters, he was outraged. “The board is treating Richard like he’s dirt,” he said recently. “He’s a shy man. This is difficult for him.” (“Bob is treating me like I’m a dissident Chinese,” Walter said.) Now, after the failure of the lawsuit, Bernstein girded the Walters for protracted battle.

Their next move was to hire a private investigator. In June, the investigator attended a lecture that Hatleberg was giving at Sotheby's. She procured a card that listed 1016 Fifth Avenue as Hatleberg's business address ("readily available for distribution to attendees," she noted in her report) and even asked a few questions. Afterward, she researched some of the chemicals that Hatleberg had said that he used, including RTV silicone, liquid nitrogen, and a solvent called "attack," overexposure to which, her report read, "can cause loss of consciousness and death." Her information gave the Walters some fresh hope. If Hatleberg's work was potentially noisome as well as noisy, the board would have no choice but to stop it. They were beginning to lose faith, though. They were sure that the board was against them. As Richard said, "I'll bet that if you had a bunch of hookers in the building you'd get away with it."

One of the first things you see, after you step off the elevator on the seventh floor at 1016 Fifth—blue-liveried attendant holding open the elevator door—and into apartment 7D, is the unicycle. It occupies the same place in the Dimson apartment that the Walters' walking sticks do one floor below. If there is such a thing as a unicyclist look, Hatleberg's got it: he is short and slight, narrow-shouldered, with curly, receding black hair and an anxious turn of the lips that recalls Horshack, from "Welcome Back, Kotter." When I visited him this summer, he was dressed in black Nikes, black jeans, and a sweater, and was accompanied by a miniature poodle. He remarked that he preferred living downtown.

The layout of the apartment was virtually identical to the one downstairs, but the design was very different—sleek and modern, with an Art Deco flair. In the spot where the Walters have a grandfather clock, Dimson has a giant Thai Buddha. New Age-y music was playing—softly—from speakers hidden in the ceiling of the dining room. Dimson was away.

The first thing Hatleberg remarked upon was that he had read recently in the *Times* about Pullman, the bond salesman who was kicked out of his co-op for litigating over noise. Hatleberg seemed to

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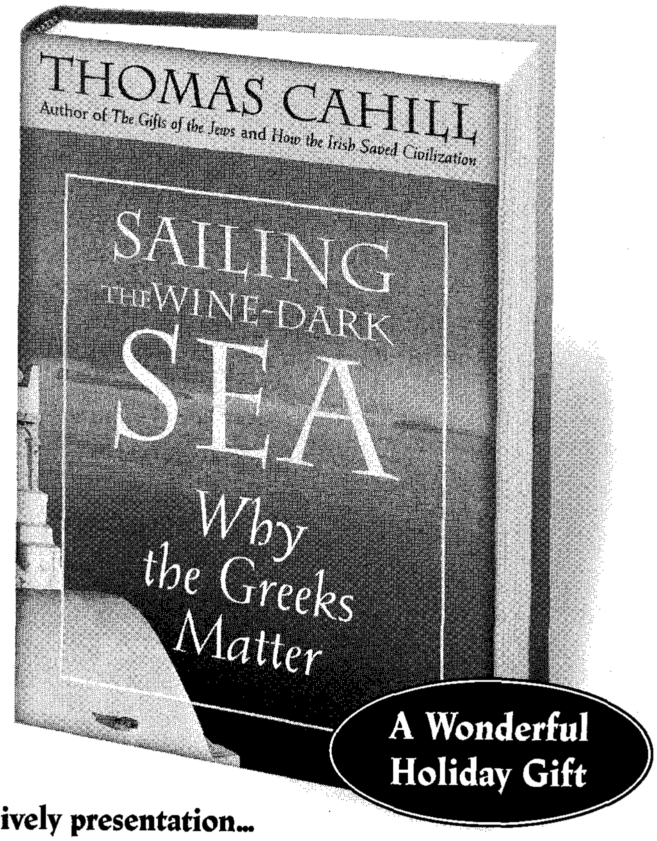
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feel that it was an encouraging precedent.

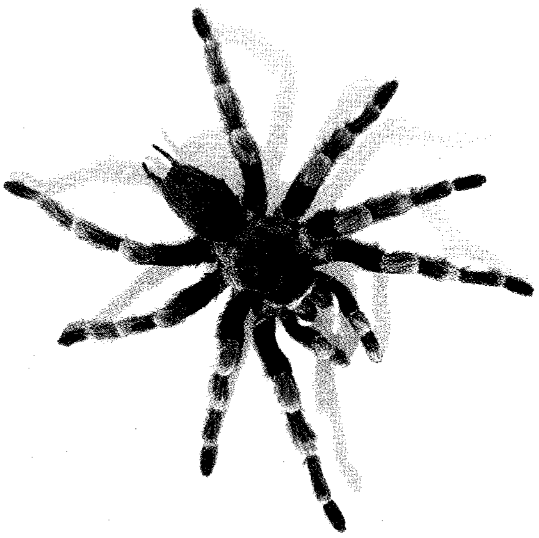
Frankly, he preferred to talk about gems. He launched into a dizzying dissertation on the history of counterfeiting: the first synthetic ruby, in France in the eighteen-nineties; Mikimoto's imitation pearls; Bell Labs' early synthetic diamonds, which looked like dirt; General Electric's first gem-quality fake diamond, in 1972. He chronicled his own obsession with the legendary Koh-i-noor, a hundred-and-eighty-six-carat diamond that had been coveted by rulers in Persia and India for five hundred years. In 1849, as part of the Treaty of Lahore, Queen Victoria laid claim to it, and had it cut down to a more brilliant hundred and nine carats. In 1991, Hatleberg, with the help of a curator at the British Museum, tracked down a cast of the original in a drawer in the museum's basement. Since then, he's been negotiating to re-create it.

"Now I'm going to show you my studio," Hatleberg said. Off a hallway with several doors was a little corridor, on the floor of which lay a glazed slab of petrified wood, about the size of a beach towel—a hundred and eighty million years old, he said. "It's the drawbridge to my studio. This is my artistic space. I want it to be separate." Hatleberg removed his shoes and had me do the same, before crossing into what, by Manhattan standards, would be considered a small-to-medium-sized bedroom, if there were a bed in it, as there was in Linda Walter's room, directly below. Instead, there was the baldachino in one corner and a low-slung chair in another, and art work propped here and there—corncobs with pearl kernels, and tiny crystal figurines. The décor was Sorcerer's Lair.

"I'm sure you've noticed that this is a place where not a lot of manufacturing goes on," he said. "The only machine I have here is my faceting machine. I can do amazing things with that machine." When he delivers his replicas, he likes to put the original in one hand and the copy in the other and say, "Guess." To replicate a diamond, he needs to spend as much time with it as possible. (He says, however, that he never has the diamonds in the apartment.) He makes molds out of RTV silicon, then a resin cast the exact size and shape of the original, and tries to find the right combination of natural gem and synthetic materials to mimic the gem's distinctive color. "Then it's just me at my faceting machine," Hatleberg said. The term "gem-cutting" is something of a misnomer, he added. "There was this famous idea that gem-cutters could cleave a diamond"—that with a mallet and a chisel they could create exquisite jewels out of lumpen stone. (The Walters seemed to have this impression, too.) In fact, gems are ground down, worn away.

Hattleberg got behind the baldachino to demonstrate. The machine was about the size of a turntable, with a grinding wheel connected to a device that resembled an optician's gadget: dials, lenses, an adjustable arm. When he turned it on, it hummed faintly. Then he attached a cube of quartz to a clamp on the arm, which he swung toward the wheel. He pressed the stone against the wheel. It

{ *Common Name: Spiders. Habitat: The Amex. Genus: S&P 500.* }



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sounded a bit like a running toilet or a handheld fan. "This is their case, Nick," he said. "*This* is their case." There was no way to tell whether what he was doing just then was what he usually did, when no one was watching and the Walters were lying in bed, but, if it was, an argument could be made that there was something hypnotic about the sound.

Hatleberg then opened a hidden cabinet in the wall and pulled out two bottles. "These are the chemicals I have: diamond powder"—he unscrewed the cap—"and mineral oil. Totally harmless." He presented them for observation—odorlessness confirmed—then put them back in the cabinet and shut the door. As for the other chemicals—the attack and so forth—he said that he uses them rarely and in minuscule quantities, and that when he needs them he goes out and gets them, then throws them away. He also said that he did heavy work in a studio downtown—and that he had never crushed pearls.

"You've heard the sound, you've seen the chemicals," he said, pausing to allow the Hans Blix-ian implications to sink in. Outside, you could hear a bird in a tree. "These people have caused a lot of grief in the household. I'm trying to restrain myself here. Doing this is about as loud as braiding a woman's hair. I have my own opinions about them. I call the man 'sir.' It's a civility that he has not returned."

It should be noted that, to this day, the Walters and Rise Dimson have never met. The doormen make sure that their paths don't cross.

"I will not get in the elevator with that person," Linda Walter said of Hatleberg, a few nights later. The Bernsteins were visiting. They and the Walters sat around a coffee table in the living room. Bob Bernstein is tall and gregarious, with an air of elegant amusement that suggests a lifetime of arguments savored and won; his wife, Helen, Richard's younger sister, looks as though she's been a wry witness to most of them.

"The board has completely neglected its responsibility," Bob Bernstein said.

Richard said, "They won't return my calls."

"It's like a circus," Linda said. "I've lived in New York all my life and I've never had this before."

At some point during the conversation, the air-conditioner in the living room window had started whirring loudly, as air-conditioners will do. The sound was somewhere between a buzz and a rattle—a loose belt or fan, maybe.

Linda kept glancing, with increasing agitation, over at the window. "Richard," she said.

The whirring continued. "The idea that nothing is going on is on its face ludicrous," Bernstein was saying.

"Richard," she said again. Her husband looked at her, then stood up and went over to the window. "It's the air-conditioner, not Hatleberg," he said—a joke. He turned the thing off. The silence was a balm. As the room got warmer and the buses sped by, the Walters continued to press their case. ♦

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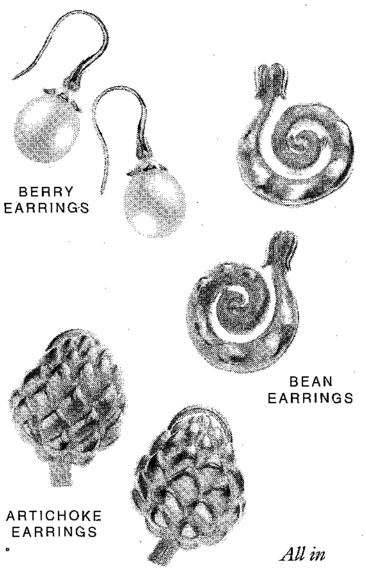

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# THANKSGIVING RULES REVISED

BY BRUCE McCALL

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Article XII of the 1663 Jamestown Convention has been amended as of this date to include the following:

1. Thanksgiving-dinner guests are no longer required to play Scrabble, Go Fish, or Monopoly with children under the age of ten. Withholding of liquor is coercion.

2. A shaker of Martinis no longer has official standing as Thanksgiving breakfast. Early risers: the Thanksgiving Day cocktail hour now begins only *after* you have arrived at the venue and parked your car, and never before sunrise.

3. You cannot decline the Kansas Riesling served with dinner out of professed adherence to the claim that "the official Thanksgiving mascot is the 101-proof Wild Turkey." This is apocryphal.

4. The mandatory minimum number of guests related by blood to the host / hostess is increased to sixteen. Seating them on the sun porch, in the attic, or in the basement for the Thanksgiving meal is no longer permissible, nor is the requirement that they wear bags over their heads and/or name tags. Asking how they're doing remains optional.

5. In-laws must now be accorded full human status. Their chairs must face the dinner table, and they must be offered a choice of dark or white meat.

6. Native American guests must now be offered bourbon, Scotch, gin, or other alcoholic beverages by name. They must *not* be described as "heap strong firewater."

7. When you are handed a family scrapbook or photo album, you must keep such article in your possession for at least a hundred and twenty seconds before passing it to the next person. You may *not* ask if your hundred and twenty seconds are up.

8. Precocious children under twelve years of age may now be fitted with muzzles by a non-parent after the first hour.

9. Reminiscences that touch upon parental favoritism, unpaid personal loans, and arrests of blood relations' children are discouraged.

10. You are entitled to *ten* naps per twelve-hour Thanksgiving Day period. Moments after 4 P.M., when time itself seems to have stopped, do not count as naps. Do *not* commence a nap when a blood relation older than you is addressing you directly.

11. You will be videotaped by your most moronic relation. Failing to coöperate by smiling / making funny faces / rushing the lens carries the penalty of spending next Thanksgiving at this relation's home.

12. Vacating the premises before Thanksgiving dinner is served in order to "get a breath of fresh air," "check the pressure in the tires," or "watch for shooting stars" will now be considered a desertion of familial responsibilities, punishable by talking college football with an in-law for thirty minutes without the aid of an alcoholic beverage.

13. The host / hostess cannot depart the house, for any reason, until one hour after the last guest has left, been expelled, or vanished. (Check corners, crawl spaces, and under the dinner table before lights-out.)

Happy Thanksgiving! *

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* "Happy Thanksgiving!" is meant only as an encouraging phrase and will not necessarily insure a result like the one depicted in the Norman Rockwell painting. ♦

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### DEPT. OF SPECIAL EFFECTS

# IT CAME FROM HOLLYWOOD

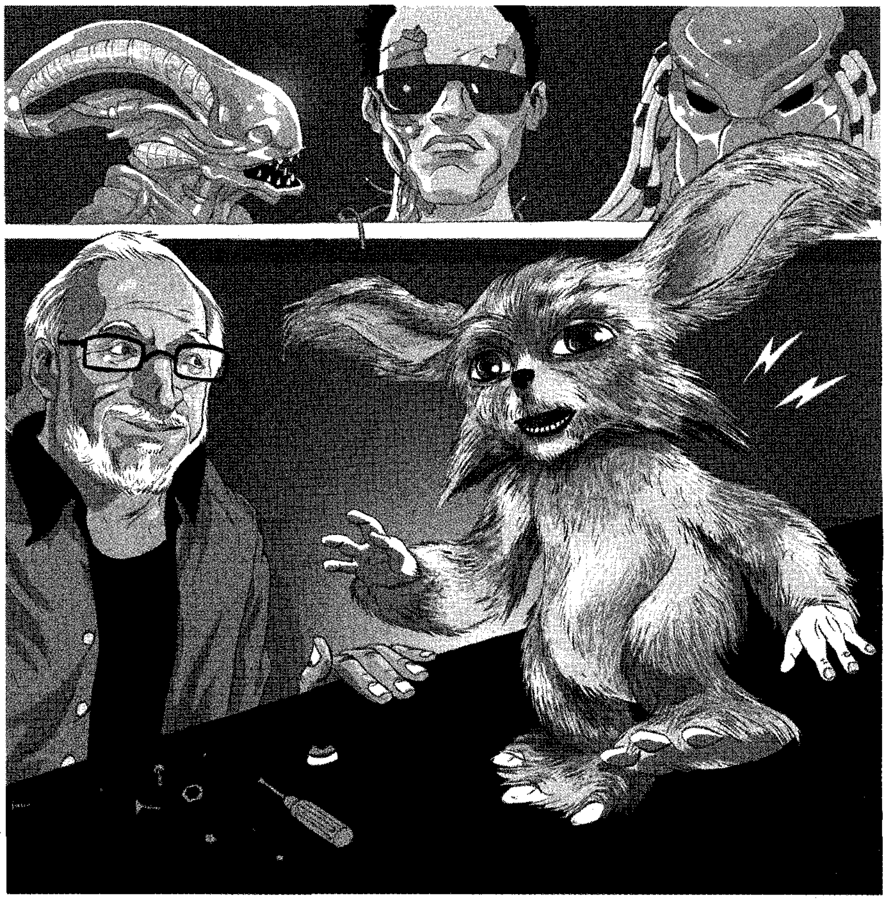
*What happens when the top F/X man collaborates with an M.I.T. scientist?*

### BY JOHN SEABROOK

The DVD of "Jurassic Park III" comes with an F/X voice-over, in which the special-effects creators talk about their work. If you listen during the first gory sequence in the film, when the Spinosaurus jumps out of the jungle and, shockingly, devours a man in one bite, you will hear Stan Winston's voice—a gentle, sweet-sounding voice—exclaiming with delight, "I love it when dinos eat people!" He sounds almost moved. Dinosaurs provide Winston with an opportunity to evoke the ancient, hardwired horror of being eaten alive, as well as with a chance to display the disgusting remains of humans after the beasts have finished with them. For a creature-maker, it doesn't get much better than that.

Now fifty-seven, Winston has, during thirty-five years in the movie business, almost single-handedly elevated the craft of creature-making from the somewhat comical man-in-a-rubber-suit monsters of the nineteen-fifties and sixties to animatronics—electronically animated, part-robot, part-puppet creatures that have terrified millions of moviegoers. He won his first Oscar for James Cameron's 1986 film "Aliens," of which the most spectacular creature was the Alien Queen—a fourteen-foot-high, crustacean-necked monster with a shiny cockroach carapace, yellow acid for blood, and two jaws full of mucus-smeared, razor-sharp teeth. (Before becoming a creature-maker, Winston studied to be a dentist.) He won his second and third Oscars for Cameron's second "Terminator" movie (1991), for makeup and visual effects, and his fourth for Steven Spielberg's "Jurassic Park" (1993), for which Winston created, among other effects, robotic velociraptors and a forty-foot-long Tyrannosaurus rex, with hydraulically driven limbs and radio-controlled dilating eyes. His dinosaurs got better with each sequel, even if the movies didn't.

Winston's success has coincided with the rise of computer graphics, or CG—a technology that allows F/X artists to make monsters entirely out of pixels, greatly expanding the range of possibilities. Yet CG monsters rarely seem as scary as Winston's mechanical monsters, in large part because they aren't filmed in live-action sequences with the actors but are added to the film during postproduction. "When you come to the set," Steven Spielberg told me, "and there's a thirty-six-foot-high creature there, waiting to perform with the actors, it's inspiring—to all of us. If you make creatures only on the computer, it takes the fun out of it."



Leonardo, unlike Stan Winston's other creations, could one day have "robot emotions."

TOMER HANUKA

Nothing about Stan Winston seems monstrous. White-haired and bearded, he is slight of build, and has a soothing way of talking about creating pain and fear which probably would have served him well as a dentist. Directors like to work with him, Cameron says, because "Stan has never lost the love of putting on a show; he'll get all excited, saying, 'This is going to scare the crap out of people,' and he infects you with his enthusiasm." When I asked Winston about this one day—how can a guy who has scared so many people be so likable?—he said, "I hope I'm likable as a human being, but I do love to scare people. People like being scared. I'll tell you something, it's the people who don't go to scary movies who have nightmares. What I do is I allow them to get their fears out in the movie theatre so they don't have to be scared at home."

Stan Winston Studio—a full-service special-effects shop, of which Winston is both the owner and the head artist—is a thirty-five-thousand-square-foot industrial space in the San Fernando Valley. In addition to making creatures for movies and television (these include appealing characters, like the duck in the Aflac insurance commercial, with its Chaplinesque walk, and the grumpy old

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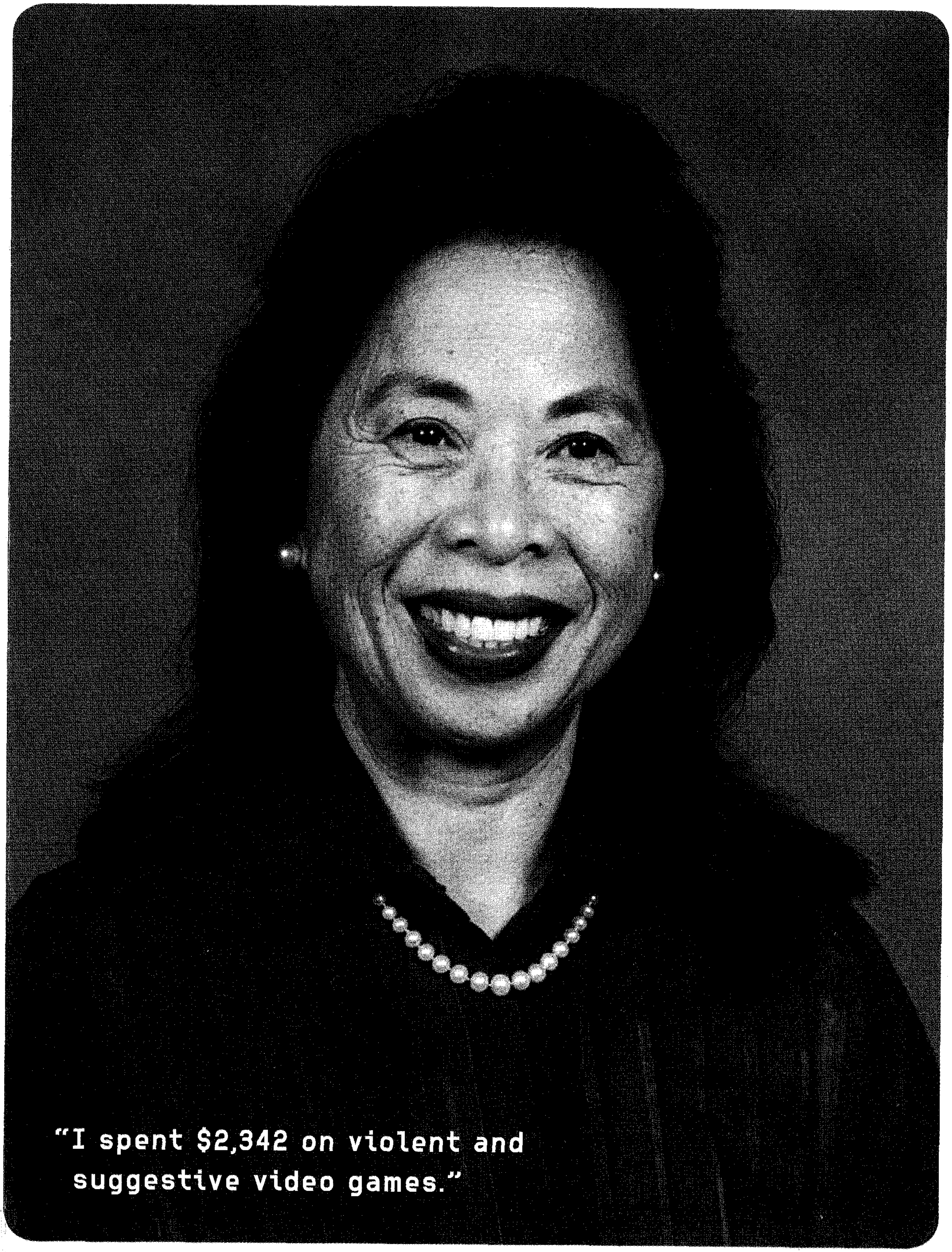
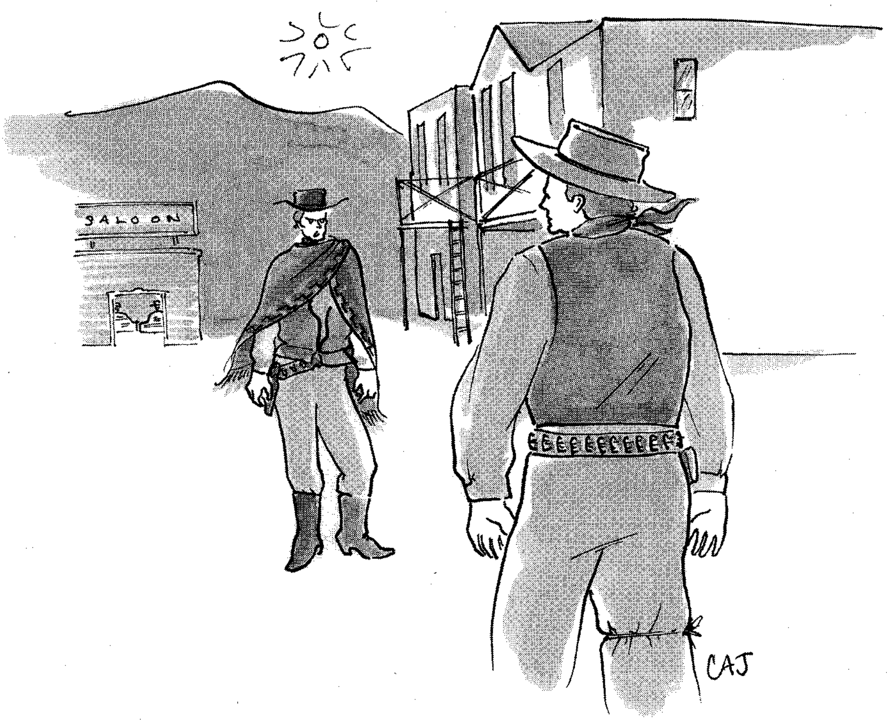

"I spent $2,342 on violent and suggestive video games."



*"It's not a shawl, hombre—it's a hand-woven poncho."*

• •

frogs created for a series of Budweiser commercials), Winston produces a line of monster toys, and is in the process of creating a new Horror Channel, featuring twenty-four-hour horror on cable. Winston and his wife of thirty-four years, Karen, live in Malibu, and he has his choice of a Hummer, two Harleys, a Ferrari, or a turbo-charged Porsche to make the drive to work.

The large workspace on the ground floor is full of the smells of creature-making—silicon, urethane, latex, glue. Scattered on worktables are arms and legs, some human, some animal. People are drawing, painting, sculpting, engineering, and wiring. Winston mostly manages his artists, several of whom have been with him for twenty years, though he occasionally sketches and sculpts. Some of his artists use computers to design the creatures, but Winston is proudly computer-illiterate.

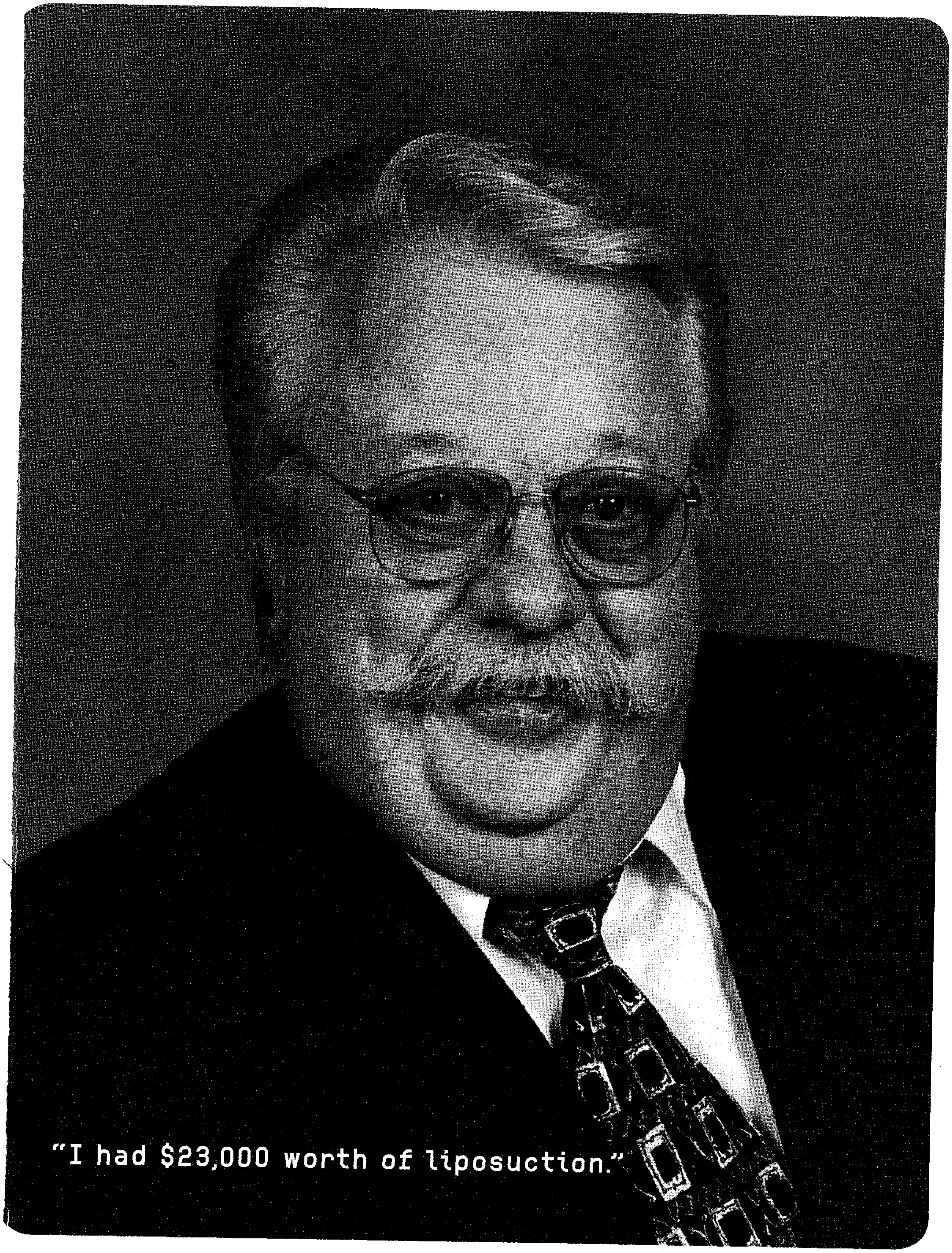
Also downstairs is a diorama of the great Stan Winston monsters, displayed in a big, dimly lit conference room, with spotlights on the creatures. Here are Winston's takes on the mythic horrors—fire-breathing dragons, ogres, the Minotaur, the Harpies—that have been interpreted in art and literature for the past ten thousand years and reinterpreted, for the past century, in film. Winston's Predator, from the 1987 film by John McTiernan, refers to movie monsters such as the She-Creature, from 1956, which, in turn, harks back to Grendel, the monster in "Beowulf." But the Predator's Rastafarian-looking quills and his fearsome mandibles made the horror fresh. Frankenstein, imagined by Mary Shelley, in 1818, was a myth of modern hubris going back to Adam and Eve. It was made a modern classic in the 1931 Universal film starring Boris Karloff. That Frankenstein image was unsurpassed until James Cameron came to Winston with his idea for the Terminator.

Upstairs, some of Winston's serious art work is on display, including a life-size, hyperrealist bronze sculpture of Arnold Schwarzenegger's head, each bone and muscle precisely rendered. Winston gave the original sculpture to his good friend the Governor for his fiftieth birthday, several years ago. (The idea to do these kinds of sculptures, Winston told me, came from another pal, the actor Rod Steiger, almost twenty years ago. "Steiger said, 'Do something serious.' As if making monsters wasn't serious. So I did a classic sculpture so that people could see that the monster-maker is also an artist.")

Winston casts himself alternately as a businessman and as an artist, swinging between pride and humility. He says, of his F/X atelier, "I have the greatest artists in the world working for me. The people here are the equals of the Renaissance artists of five hundred years ago. Michelangelo—what did he do? He created fantasies—gargoyles, images of Hell, demons, angels. Just like us. Or look at a great painting like 'The Raft of the Medusa'—it's horrific! That parallels what we do." And, he goes on, although making monsters does not rank high in the art world's hierarchy, "I guarantee you that long after the painting the snobs say is art—the painting and sculpture in the galleries—is forgotten, the face of the Terminator will be remembered." But soon Winston will retreat from those remarks, and assure you that he is just a monster-maker after all.

As an adolescent in Arlington, Virginia, Winston wrote and directed his own scary movies, which he shot on an 8-mm. movie camera. His parents, who were in the garment business (Stan's family changed the name from Weinstein), wanted their son to be a lawyer or a doctor, but after two years of "predent," at the University of Virginia, Stan became an art major. "My parents' jaws dropped, but I had to let the artist inside me out," he said. "But I always had the businessman saying, 'O.K., Stan, indulge your passion for art, but how are you going to make a living at it?' "

Winston came to Hollywood in 1968, planning to be an actor. "Actually, I wanted to be a star, which is why I failed as an actor," he told me. While he was in Southern California, waiting for the acting jobs that never arrived, Winston decided to learn the trade of theatrical makeup at Walt Disney Studios. After graduating, he quickly began to get work in television. He did the makeup for "Roots," and he aged Cicely Tyson some ninety years for her role in "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman," for which he won an Emmy. In 1977, he went to New York, where Sidney Lumet was filming "The Wiz." (When Winston joined the cast and crew and "they saw that the black-makeup guy was this little Jewish white kid, they were stunned," he said.) Winston did the metallic makeup for the Tin Man and the mechanically articulated faces of the flying monkeys. He was then asked to work on "Heartbeeps," which featured Ber-


"I had $23,000 worth of liposuction."

nadette Peters and Andy Kaufman as robots. "After that, I was no longer the black-makeup guy, I was the robot guy."

In the early nineteen-eighties, Winston met a young director named James Cameron, who had a script for a film called "The Terminator." Cameron had a backer, a star in Schwarzenegger, and a character who was about to become one of the all-time great monsters in movies. Cameron had made several paintings of the monster he imagined—a face that was a nightmarish melding of man and machine, with part of the flesh stripped away, showing the gleaming metal underneath. In Cameron's vision, the face would deteriorate throughout the movie, until finally all the flesh was burned away to reveal an entire steel endoskeleton. Computer graphics—the technology that was used to create the morphing T-1000 in Cameron's "Terminator 2"—did not yet exist. To create a monstrous robot, Cameron had either to put a man in a suit or to use stop-motion animation—scale-model figures that are shot one frame at a time—which F/X artists had been using since the great Ray Harryhausen films of the fifties and sixties, like "Jason and the Argonauts." But movie audiences had grown used to stop-motion animation in the intervening years, and the effects no longer looked as convincing.

"Technically, I didn't want the robot to look like a man in a suit, because the Terminator was a robot inside a man—a robot with flesh," Cameron told me. "We could not accomplish that visual by putting the robot outside a human form, then trying to imagine that it was also inside. It just wouldn't work. But nobody had ever created a robot that wasn't a suit." Cameron asked other directors if they knew of a makeup artist who could achieve the kind of effect he had in mind, and he soon heard about the robot guy. Cameron said, "I went to Stan with my drawings, and said, 'This is what I want the Terminator to look like. I don't know how to build it, but it's got to look like this.' " Winston altered the traditional man-in-a-suit formula—he made a mask out of Arnold Schwarzenegger's face, and cut part of it away to reveal mechanized-looking makeup underneath, which was applied to the actor's face. When Winston heard that Cameron was planning to shoot the endoskeleton scenes in stop-motion animation, he said, "Why don't you let us build you a full-size animatronic puppet—a robot, essentially, that would play the robot—and you can then shoot that sequence in live action?"

Cameron let him, and for "Terminator 2" Winston built an even more sophisticated robotic endoskeleton, which you see early in the movie, crunching a human skull under its steel foot. Winston's shop also designed scores of other effects, including the unforgettable image of the villain, Robert Patrick, his torso cleaved in two by a metal bar.

When Steven Spielberg collaborates with Winston, he sends the screenplay to Winston and then goes to see him. "Stan listens very intensely, until he gets the director's vision," Spielberg told me. "I swear, he must be the first Method monster man. He'll assume the creature's body position, make roars, do the facial expressions—trying to figure out how the creature is going to project the emotion you're going for."

Winston says, "We are all extremely attuned to certain expressions, and I think we understand character by a certain look—that sidelong glance that shows you the way we really feel." When designing a creature's face, he explained, "I sit in front of a mirror making faces." He imagines the emotion that the creature is feeling in a particular situation, watching for the distinctive twist of the eyebrow or the cruel curl of the lip in his own face, and then draws it.

After the creature's face and body have been designed in two dimensions, a three-dimensional model is created. At this stage, all the creature's cosmetic elements—color, hair, skin tone—are selected. Sometimes, if puppetry is part of the plan, Winston's staff of puppeteers begin practicing with the creature, at times wearing "gypsy suits"—full-body controls that allow the puppeteers to manipulate the creature's features. In many cases, a single creature is performed by multiple puppeteers—one for the ears, one for the eyebrows, one for the hands, one for the legs—who must all learn to work together so that the creature's movements are fluid and lifelike. (When an animatronic doesn't move smoothly, the F/X artists in Winston's shop say it has the "wagga waggas.")

As Winston sees it, his job, after making sure that his creatures perform correctly, is to get the strongest possible performances out of the actors, and that often means terrifying them. "CG can't do that. How can you possibly get the best performance out of an actor when the thing he's acting with isn't there? Can't be done." The Spinosaurus in "Jurassic Park III," for example, was a twenty-five-thousand-pound robot driven by a thousand-horsepower engine. "That robot could easily have killed someone," Winston told me excitedly.

The one aspect of making lifelike creatures which no F/X artist has yet mastered is "eye line"—a creature's ability to maintain eye contact with an actor and to track movements. "You've got multiple puppet operators moving the eyes, head, and neck," Winston said, explaining why eye line is impossible. "So if any one of them moves the head in a way that's slightly out of synch with the others, the eyes don't stay on the actor." If you could design eye line into robots, puppets, and animatronics, Winston believes, it would be a breakthrough in creature-making.

During his career, Winston has become a master creator of a certain kind of artificial life. It's not a scientific endeavor, like the pursuit of artificial intelligence launched at M.I.T., in the nineteen-fifties, by a group of researchers, including Marvin Minsky and Seymour Papert, with the lofty ambition of creating machines that think like people. Winston belongs to the older tradition of "automatons," which, as described by Gaby Wood in her recent book, "Edison's Eve," goes back more than two centuries, to a famous mechanical duck built by the French engineer Jacques de Vaucanson in the seventeen-thirties. The duck could flap its wings, eat, and, most remarkably, defecate. (Voltaire observed, as Wood relates, that without the shitting duck there would be nothing to remind us of the glory of France.) The purpose of the duck, and other similar automatons, was spectacle and illusion, not science and technology.

These two notions of artificial life, the modern and the classical, came together in Spielberg's 2001 film, "A.I." In order to create the illusion that robots really could look and talk like people, Winston built

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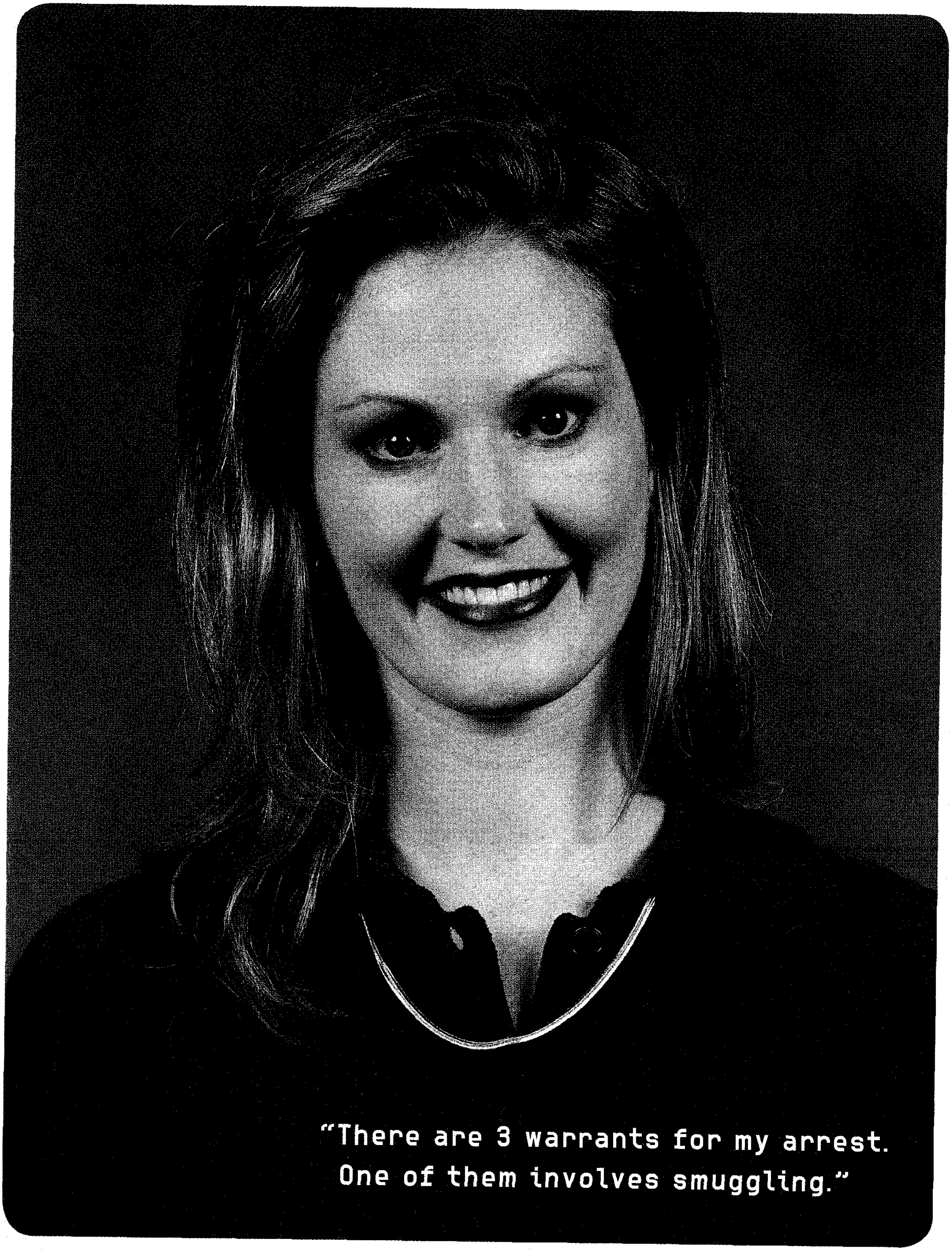
"There are 3 warrants for my arrest.
One of them involves smuggling."

nearly a dozen animatronic puppets. Teddy, the talking and walking "super toy," was just a superior mechanical duck—a puppet who needed five, sometimes six, puppeteers to bring him to life—but within the movie he appeared incredibly real, and gave one of the most compelling performances in the film.

In the summer of 2001, just before the release of "A.I.," a young computer scientist at the M.I.T. Media Lab, Cynthia Breazeal, visited Winston. For her doctorate, Breazeal had built a "sociable robot," Kismet, which had a cartoonish, humanoid face that could imitate human facial expressions. When you praised the robot, it smiled back; if you looked angry, it looked sad. Kismet and Breazeal were widely covered in the science press, and often pictured together—an attractive young woman with dark hair and eyebrows and high cheekbones, and a robot with glued-on false eyelashes from a beauty-supply store, fur for eyebrows, and surgical tubing colored in with a red pen for lips. Kathleen Kennedy, the producer of "A.I.," had seen a story about Breazeal in *Time*, and flown her to Los Angeles to brief Spielberg on robots and artificial-intelligence research, in preparation for doing press about the film.

Breazeal had a proposal for Winston. "She said, 'How would you like to build a real Teddy, a Teddy with a brain?'" he recalled. "Would I consider collaborating and sharing technology with M.I.T. and creating the real thing?" Stan Winston Studio would fund and produce the design and construction of the robot, and M.I.T. would supply the "brain": software that would allow the robot to see, hear, speak, and feel. Unlike Winston's creatures, this robot would be autonomous, its movements controlled not by puppeteers wearing suits or by operators working radio controls but by an internal mechanical system driven by its own software, and the software would give it the ability to maintain eye line. Breazeal would get a robot with a face capable of expressing the subtle cognitive processes embedded in its software; Winston would get a puppet without strings. Intellectually, their creature would, on its father's side, be descended from the classical world of automatons, and, on its mother's side, from the modern world of artificial intelligence. It would, in short, be the most lifelike mechanical creature ever built, a state-of-the-art emotional machine.

"I had to think about her offer for two seconds," Winston recalled, "and then I said, 'Of course I'm going to do this.'"

Early in their collaboration, in the spring of 2002, Winston and Breazeal selected a name: Leonardo, "because this creature represents the ideal collaboration of art and science—an artist and a scientist working together to create something real," Winston said. Then, in Los Angeles, Winston went to work on Leo's body and face. One of the few guidelines from Breazeal was that Leo not look too human, lest he fall into the "uncanny valley," a concept formulated by Masahiro Mori, a Japanese roboticist. Mori tested people's emotional responses to a wide variety of robots, from non-humanoid to completely humanoid. He found that the human tendency to empathize with machines increases as the robot becomes more human. But at a certain point, when the robot becomes *too* human, the emotional sympathy abruptly ceases, and revulsion takes its place. People began to notice not the charmingly human characteristics of the robot but the creepy zombielike differences.

Aa
Dd
Ee
Ff
Gg
H
Shanahan

*"The innocence seems forced."*

Leonardo was built alongside Winston's other projects, including the robots he did for "Terminator 3" and the animals he was making for Tim Burton's new movie, "Big Fish." Winston wanted to design a creature that was almost compulsively lovable, but the principles that informed Leonardo's design were the same as those used to make monsters. "There are certain universal facial characteristics that are known to trigger a particular kind of response in people," Winston explained to me. (Many of these principles were codified at the Disney Studios in the nineteen-thirties and forties, by the animators who created films like "Pinocchio" and "Dumbo" and "Fantasia.") "Big eyes, a head that is bigger than a body, a cute mouth, and a pug nose are considered lovable everywhere."

Lindsay Macgowan, a "rendering artist" on Winston's staff who had helped design Teddy, drew the first sketches. Leo looked a little like a Gremlin, from the 1981 Spielberg movie, and also something like one of George Lucas's Ewoks. He had collie ears, a cougarlike snout, four-fingered hands, a round, cartoonish belly, and, most uncannily, a human tongue and teeth. He stood two and a half feet tall, with three-toed feet, and was entirely covered with thick, soft fur made mostly of mohair and the tail hair of yaks, and hand-stitched into the skin, one strand at a time. His eyes and brows were youthful in appearance, but he had an old creature's hands, with lots of wrinkles around the knuckles.

Some of the aesthetic decisions about the creature's design were made with Leonardo's mechanical requirements in mind. The large head and the potbelly would allow more room for the motors,

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gears, cables, pulleys, and gimbals that constituted Leonardo's muscles. Big eyes, in addition to being adorable, would let more light in for the cameras, and the pettable ears would channel sound down to the microphones in the head.

As Winston and his staff worked on Leonardo's body, Breazeal and her students at M.I.T. were working on his brain—assembling the software that would make the robot capable of speech recognition and synthesis, visualization, and basic cognitive skills. The work entailed adapting software written at M.I.T. over a period of many years, and writing new bits of code tailored to Leo's requirements.

Breazeal grew up in California, where her parents were computer scientists. She majored in electrical and computer engineering at the University of California at Santa Barbara. (She also surfs.) After graduating, she went to M.I.T., to study under Rodney Brooks, the head of the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, and one of the world's experts on autonomous robots. Brooks was trying to steer A.I. away from the absolutist goals of its founders and toward the more modest but reasonable aims of applied robotics. Breazeal built a rover with Brooks, and also worked on a primitive humanoid robot named Cog.

Some of Breazeal's ideas correspond with those of Donald Norman, a professor of computer science and psychology at Northwestern University and an influential writer on technological design. In his forthcoming book, "Emotional Design," Norman argues that emotions play as important a part in intelligence as does cognition. Emotions do the work of judging, he says, while cognition does the work of understanding, but both kinds of thinking are necessary. "Our emotions protect us, guide us, make us inquisitive," he told me. "Robots will need the same kind of equipment so that they can learn about their environment, and how to get along in it." And robots need to display their emotions, Norman added, so that humans will be able to tell at a glance what's going on inside them.

I asked Breazeal whether she viewed her association with Hollywood as a kind of devil's bargain—in getting Leo's body and face from Hollywood, she was trading the world of science for the world of illusion. Breazeal pointed out that Hollywood has created many famous screen robots, from the Deco metal woman in Fritz Lang's "Metropolis" to Robby the Robot in "Forbidden Planet," and from Hal in "2001," on which Marvin Minsky was a consultant (Hal was totally disembodied, the opposite of Breazeal's robots), to the Terminator. Breazeal herself first became interested in robots in 1977, when she was eight, and her parents took her to see "Star Wars," which featured the droids R2-D2 and C-3PO.

But while Hollywood robots may have sparked the general public's interest in thinking machines, and in some cases influenced scientists themselves, you're still watching a man in a suit, or a hunk of painted fibreglass masquerading as a complicated piece of electronic equipment, created not by scientists but by a "robot guy." Breazeal, however, saw her collaboration with Winston in less rigid terms: "Our approach to doing design is what I call bootstrapping—create robots for real-world applications, and then improve them based on how they perform."

Working with Winston to build a lovable robot, Breazeal believes, will help her to design robots that could eventually become human companions. "If you look at the statistics here, and even more so in Japan, in twenty years there are going to be too many elderly people who need care, and there won't be enough nurses or family members to take care of them," she said. "The solution could be a sociable robot, something that lives with you and that you can have a meaningful emotional interaction with."

In the summer of 2003, the creature came East, to Breazeal's lab, on the M.I.T. campus, in Cambridge. Work on his brain continued, and Breazeal and her graduate students began training Leo to track objects with his eyes. In late August, Winston arrived for a demonstration, and I arranged to join him while he was in Boston.

On the morning of the demonstration, Leo sat on his metal base, with his eyes open, staring dully at a Tickle Me Elmo doll. When one of the students moved Elmo, the robot's eyes moved, too, tracking it. There was a computer-generated Leonardo playing on a laptop in the lab, showing what the creature will look like one day, but that day did not appear to be imminent. Leo's expression was listless, and his appearance was somewhat dishevelled—his ears had fur on them, but the rest of his fibreglass body was bare. (His yak coat was still in L.A.) The robot's facial expressions and body movements weren't being operated yet, although one of the students was moving his arms, using a gypsy suit. But the suit was a cheap one, and the student wasn't very skillful. Leo had a bad case of the wagga waggas.

Afterward, I brought up something that Marvin Minsky had said to me the day before, when I asked him for his thoughts about Leonardo. Minsky had said, "My objection to Leonardo is, it's just a trick. It doesn't really have emotions. It just knows how to fool you into thinking it does. Cynthia's an excellent engineer, but her work doesn't explain how emotions work. Leonardo is just an improved version of that software wizard, F1, that Microsoft tried to get people to buy a few years ago. People went, 'Oh, gee, that's neat,' for a couple of days, and then they got tired of it." In Minsky's view, Leonardo was more Hollywood than M.I.T.

"Shame on Marvin Minsky!" Winston declared dramatically when he had heard Minsky's views.

Breazeal, however, looked a bit taken aback. She said, "Well, I don't see Leonardo's emotions as being a trick. They serve a useful function for the robot. We're not trying to capture the human-feeling side of emotions, but we are trying to capture the pragmatic side—communicating with others and behaving more intelligently. If robots are going to have emotions, they're going to have robot emotions."

"And what is trick and what is real?" Winston added. "If you go to a film, a love story, and what you see on the screen makes you cry—isn't that a real emotion?" He leaned back in his chair and folded his arms confidently. "Let's say you tell me a joke and I laugh at it. Am I laughing because I think in my soul your joke is funny, or because I'm programmed to do it—I want to make you feel good, because that then validates me? The point is, you can't know; I can't know. But the robot will be more honest—he won't laugh at my joke unless it's funny."

Building Leonardo had cost Winston almost a million dollars so far. (The creature's coat alone was tens of thousands of dollars.) "At first, it wasn't about the bottom line, it was about let's do something no one has ever done before," Winston told me. "But then my practical side started saying, 'O.K., Stan, this is cool, but what can I derive from this that's good for my business?' "

The most obvious application was a new generation of animatronic puppets, produced exclusively by Stan Winston Studio, that could lock eyes with actors. But, more important, Stan Winston Studio would own the character of Leonardo. Directors generally have creative control of a creature while a film is in production, and the character rights are the property of the studio backing the film. The creature-maker, who, of all the artists involved in creating a film, comes closest to the primal act of creation, doesn't own his own creature. But Stan Winston is the auteur of Leo.

Winston hopes to make his creature a star. "I can envision a story written with Leonardo in it, and a movie with him as the main character—a wonderful, folksy, Disneyesque PG story that is all about him," Winston said.

Judging by the latest reports from Breazeal's lab, the creature is making progress toward that goal: he can nod, cock his head quizzically when he's confused, and blink almost flirtatiously.

I asked Winston whether Leo could be a monster.

"I don't think so," he said. "But anything's possible. I'll say this. He could be scary. You'll have an animatronic puppet actor that will never take his eyes off you. How scary is that?" ♦

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### CORRECTION OF THE WEEK

*From the Times.*

An obituary last Wednesday about Marvin Smith, a leading photographer of Harlem who worked with his identical twin, Morgan, described the closeness of the two men—it was said that they never used the pronoun "I"—and recounted an anecdote about Marvin Smith's response to the illness that caused his brother's death, in 1993.

The article said that Morgan Smith died of testicular cancer and that his brother, in response, had his own testicles removed. That account was given to The Times by a friend of both men. It should not have been published unless it could be verified and attributed.

After the obituary appeared, Monica Smith, the daughter of Morgan Smith, told The Times that her father had had prostate cancer and that her uncle did not have his testicles removed.

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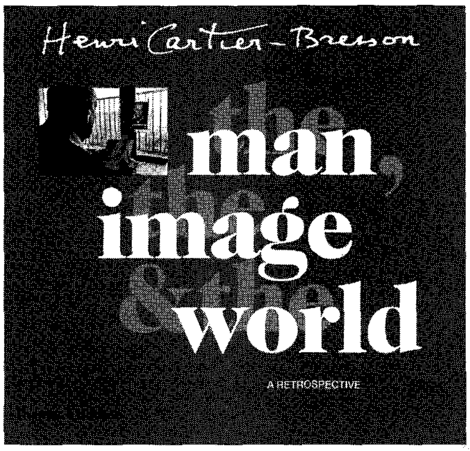

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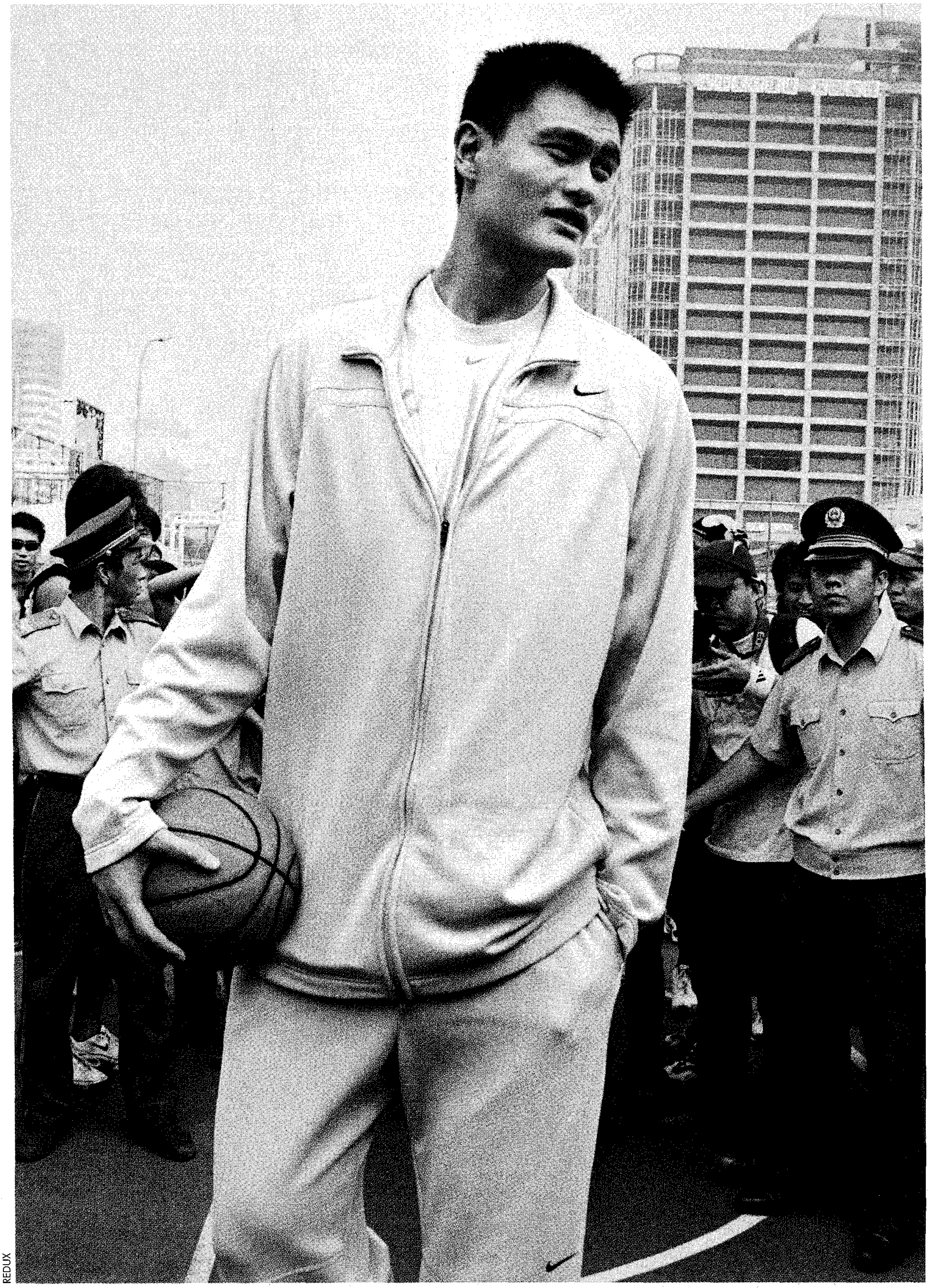
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*Yao was selected for a basketball program in third grade, when he was already five-seven. Photograph by Mark Leong.*

PROFILES

# HOME AND AWAY

*Yao Ming's journey from China to the N.B.A., and back.*

BY PETER HESSLER

Little Fatty kept leaving it short. Twice he dropped the basketball on the way up, and the third time, when Yao Ming finally lifted him above the rim, he held the ball too low. His name was Sun Haoxuan; he was four years old, weighed fifty-nine pounds, and had been selected by an advertising firm that had recently scouted Beijing kindergartens for a fat boy with round cheeks and big dark eyes. There was a substantial talent pool. In Chinese cities, rising standards of living have combined with the planned-birth policy in a way that recalls the law of conservation of mass: there are fewer children, but often there is more child. It's common for adults to refer to these kids as Xiao Pangzi—Little Fatty. "Get Little Fatty ready!" the director shouted whenever he needed Sun Haoxuan. "Move Little Fatty back two steps!"

We were at the Beijing Film Studios, where Yao Ming, the starting center for the Houston Rockets, was shooting a television commercial for China Unicom, a telecommunications company. The script was simple: fat child meets seven-foot-six-inch basketball player; basketball player lifts fat child; fat child dunks. What had not been factored in was Little Fatty's behavior. He squirmed away at every opportunity; sometimes he pointed directly at Yao Ming and announced, with an air of sudden revelation, "Yao Ming!" For half an hour, the adults in the studio—cameramen, assistants, tech guys—had been silently aiming ill wishes his way, and maybe that was why, on the fourth take, Yao stumbled and accidentally rammed Little Fatty's nose against the rim. The sounds came in quick succession: a soft thud, a dropped ball—*bounce*, *bounce*, *bounce-bounce*—and then the child began to wail.

The boy's mother rushed over, and Yao Ming stood helplessly, shoulders slumped. Somebody wiped Little Fatty's face—no blood, no foul. On the next take, he finally dunked the ball, and there was a thin round of applause. Yao wandered over to the edge of the set, where I was standing, and said, in English, "Weight training."

After a sensational rookie season in the National Basketball Association, Yao, who is twenty-three, had returned to China in early May with one clear objective: to lead the national team to the title in the Asian Basketball Championship, which serves as the regional qualifier for the 2004 Olympics. Usually, China dominates Asian basketball, but this year, because of political problems, Wang Zhizhi, the country's second-best player, had not come back from America. Yao Ming had become involved in a high-profile lawsuit, which was interpreted by the Chinese press as a clash between the rights of the individual and the authority of the state. Increasingly, Yao's world was divided: there was the sanctity of the sport and, off court, a whirlwind of distractions, ranging from the burdensome to the bizarre. When I had last visited him, in July, he was staying with the Chinese team in Qinhuangdao, a seaside town that was hosting an exhibition game against a squad from the United States Basketball Academy. Yao didn't play—he had just received eight stitches in the eyebrow after a teammate elbowed him in practice. Before the game, a China Unicom representative with a digital recorder coached Yao through a series of phrases that would be sold as alarm messages to mobile-phone subscribers. "Wake up, lazy insect!" Yao said obediently, and then his bandaged brow dipped when the woman asked him to repeat it ("More emphasis!").

That evening, the Chinese nearly threw the game away—in the final quarter, they couldn't handle a full-court press from the ragtag American team. "I think the center needs to come to half-court against the press," Yao told me afterward, in his hotel room. Liu Wei, the Chinese point guard and Yao's best friend, was sprawled on one bed. Yao sat on the other bed, which had been crudely extended: the head consisted of a wooden cabinet covered with blankets. We spoke in English; he talked about the N.B.A. off-season news that he had culled from the Internet. He had not spoken to any of his Houston teammates since returning to China. "Did you hear about Rodman?" Yao said. "He might come back. I can't believe the Lakers got Payton and Malone. I can't believe they only spent six million. If Kobe is O.K., it's like a Dream Team." The names sounded foreign and far away—Mark Cuban, Shaq, Kirilenko. "AK-47," Yao said, using the sports-talk nickname for Andrei Kirilenko, a Russian forward on the Utah Jazz. Yao smiled like a kid at the sound of the phrase. "AK-47," he said again.

Yao Ming weighed ten pounds at birth. His mother, Fang Fengdi, is over six-two; his father, Yao Zhiyuan, is six-ten. Both were centers: he played for the Shanghai city team, and she was on China's national team. Chinese sports couples aren't uncommon—Yao Ming is dating Ye Li, a six-two forward on the women's national team. When Yao was growing up, the apartment directly overhead was home to the Sha family; the parents had both been point guards for Shanghai teams. "My mother and father were introduced by the basketball organization," Sha Yifeng, a childhood friend of Yao Ming, told me. "In the old days, that's how they took care of your life."

Today, Yao's parents are in their early fifties, trim and black-haired, and they carry themselves with the physical dignity of athletes. But they speak about basketball with detachment. Neither played the game as a child; sports were a

*"I'd hang up on you right now if I didn't have such an unbelievable rate."*

• •

low priority for China in the nineteen-sixties, particularly during the early years of the Cultural Revolution. Later, officials began to restore the national sports system, scouting for height to fill out the basketball rosters. Yao Zhiyuan began to play at the age of nineteen. Fang Fengdi was discovered at sixteen. "To be honest, I didn't much like it," she told me, when I met them both in Shanghai. "I wanted to be a dancer or an actress." By 1970, she was travelling to games around the world with the national team. "I didn't think of it as something I did or didn't want to do," she said. "I thought of it as a responsibility. It was a job."

In China, competitive sport is a foreign import. Traditional physical activities like *wushu* and *qigong* are as much aesthetic and spiritual as they are athletic. Chinese historians say that modern sport began after the 1839-42 Opium War. In the following decades, as foreign traders and missionaries established themselves in treaty ports, their schools and charitable institutions introduced Western competitive sports. American missionaries brought basketball to China at the end of the nineteenth century.

During the early nineteen-hundreds, as the Chinese struggled to overcome foreign occupation, they began to see sports as a symbolic way to avenge the injustices of the past century. The goal was to beat the foreigner at his own game. After the Communists came to power, in 1949, they established a state-funded sports-training system modelled on the Soviet Union's. Promising young athletes were recruited for special "sports schools."

When Yao Ming entered the third grade, he was five-seven, and Shanghai's Xuhui District Sports School selected him for its after-school basketball program. Recently, I visited Yao's first coach, Li Zhangming, who, like a traditional Chinese educator, spoke of Yao in completely unsentimental terms ("He didn't much like basketball. He was tall, but slow and uncoördinated"). After our conversation, I wandered around the basketball courts of Shanghai's No. 54 Middle School, where the Xuhui Sports School holds some of its practices. I watched a group of young girls performing basketball drills, then introduced myself to the coach, a tall woman named Tao Yanping.

"I was a teammate of Yao's mother," Tao said. "I went to their wedding. I remember giving them towels and thermoses—things you gave newlyweds back then. See that girl there?" She pointed out a red-faced child, the tallest on the court. "Her mother was also my teammate. That girl is in the third grade. Her mother is 1.83 metres tall, and she made the national team."

I asked Tao how she recruited. "We go to the schools and look at the children's height, and then we check their parents' height," she said.

The two-hour practice consisted mostly of ballhandling drills. Tao was attentive, shouting commands at her charges ("Little Swallow, you're travelling! Who taught you to do that?"). At the end of the practice, tall parents materialized at courtside. Zhang Jianrong, a woman who was nearly six feet tall, told me that basketball was just a healthy activity for her daughter; the girl's studies were more important. Like the other parents, Zhang was a basketball mom in a country that selects its basketball moms by height.

The method of early recruitment is a product of China's inability to provide every public school with coaches and sports facilities. The system has proved effective in low-participation, routine-based sports like gymnastics and diving, but when it comes to basketball it may be China's greatest weakness. In America, where community leagues and school coaches are plentiful, athletes emerge from an enormous pyramid of participants. Some, like Allen Iverson, rise to the top with remarkable passion and creativity—but if a recruiter had shown up at the Iverson home when Allen was in the third grade, he would have found no father and a short mother who had given birth at the age of fifteen. It's significant that China has yet to produce a great male guard—the position requires skill and intensity rather than height. All three Chinese players in the N.B.A. are centers, and two are second-generation centers. The Chinese national team is notorious for choking in key games, partly because the ballhandling is inconsistent. Players rarely appear to enjoy themselves, and their character has not been formed by true competition; even as free-market reforms have changed many Chinese industries, the sports world is a throwback to socialism, with its careful planning and career stability. Once, when I asked Yao Ming how many Chinese would be in the N.B.A. in a decade, he said only three or four.

Throughout Yao Ming's childhood, his parents emphasized that basketball was a hobby, not a career. "When I was small, I always wanted to be famous," Yao told me. "I thought I'd be a scientist or maybe a political figure. It didn't matter, as long as I was famous." In sixth grade, he grew taller than his mother. He surpassed his father's height in ninth grade. By then, he was already under contract to the Shanghai Sharks youth team. When he was seventeen, and seven-two, Yao Ming joined the Chinese national team. Relatives told me that it wasn't until then that his parents resigned themselves to his career as a professional athlete.

Once, I asked Fang Fengdi if there had been a moment when she first sensed that basketball inspired Yao Ming. It was the only time she really smiled when discussing the sport, and I sensed that she was talking about herself as much as about her son. She said, "The Harlem Globetrotters came to Shanghai when he was in elementary school. Tickets were really hard to get—I was able to find only two. I remember thinking, Americans are good at enjoying themselves! Those players took a normal sport and turned it into something else—a performance. Afterward, I could tell that it made a deep impression on Yao Ming."

The first male player to make the jump from mainland China to top-level American basketball was Ma Jian, a forward who played at the University of Utah for two years in the nineteen-nineties. Ma noticed that during Utah's pre-game meetings, an assistant coach sometimes wrote a "W" or a "B" on the chalkboard next to an opposing player's name. "The white players were shooters," Ma explained to me, when we met recently in Beijing. "If he put a 'B' there, we knew they were athletes." Ma never saw a "C" on the board. In 1995, Ma tried out for the Los Angeles Clippers. "The first time I stepped onto the team plane in the pre-season, I saw the blacks sitting on one side and the whites on the other. I looked at myself—should I go on the brothers' side or the whites' side?"

Last year, after the Rockets selected Yao Ming with the first pick in the N.B.A. draft, it was less than a week before somebody in the league made a remark that could be construed as racist. During a television interview, Shaquille O'Neal, the N.B.A.'s dominant center, announced, "Tell Yao Ming, 'Ching chong yang wah ah so.' " O'Neal's joke went largely unnoticed at the time, but it was resurrected in January of this year, when a columnist for *Asian Week* attacked O'Neal for it.

The column sparked a media frenzy shortly before Shaq and Yao's first on-court meeting. But Yao immediately defused the controversy. "There are a lot of difficulties in the two different cultures understanding each other," he said. "Chinese is hard to learn. I had trouble with it when I was little." The N.B.A. released a statement pointing out that the league included players from thirty-four countries. By game time, the issue was all but dead. The Rockets won by four points, in overtime; O'Neal outplayed Yao, but Yao had a spectacular start and held his own. Afterward, O'Neal told the press, "Yao Ming is my brother. The Asian people are my brothers."

In February, I spent most of the month following Yao's games, and people repeatedly brought up the O'Neal incident. None of the black fans I talked to had anything bad to say about Yao—many believed he brought something fresh to American sports. "It's not like normal, where people say, well, he's a black athlete, so he moves like this, or he's a white athlete, so he shoots like that," Darice Hooper, a physical therapist who was attending the All-Star Game, in Atlanta, told me.

Juaquin Hawkins, one of Yao's teammates on the Rockets, agreed. "It's not just people thinking, I'm rooting for him because he's African-American, or I'm rooting for him because he's white," he told me. Hawkins was familiar with the outsider's role. A native of Lynwood, California, he had failed to make the N.B.A. in 1997, and the following year he wound up playing professionally in Chongqing, deep in the Chinese interior. I had lived in the same region, and Hawkins laughed when I mentioned the basketball slang there. If a player shoots an air ball, the fans shout "*yangwei*"; in the Sichuan dialect, it means "impotent." To encourage the home team, they chant "*xiongqi*" ("erection").

There are few foreigners in Chongqing, and even fewer blacks. I asked Hawkins how he had coped with being so different. "I always felt like I was representing my heritage," he said. "Lyn-

*"This Martini is canonical."*

wood is next to Compton. There's a lot of negative things said about that area, and that's something I take with me wherever I go. But I had a good childhood. I was raised by my mother. I try to represent that."

An uncle had introduced Hawkins to basketball as a child; he never met his father. "All I know is his first name, and the fact that he didn't want to deal with having a family," Hawkins said. He met his wife through basketball—both had played at Lynwood High School, and then at Long Beach State. In addition to Chongqing, Hawkins had played professional basketball in Taiwan, Japan, and the Philippines. He had toured with the Harlem Globetrotters ("That was actually real beneficial"). In the summer of 2002, he tried one last time to make the N.B.A., attending the Rockets' camp, where he established himself as a defensive specialist and beat out two other unsigned players for a roster spot. At twenty-nine, he was the oldest rookie in the league to make an opening-day lineup. When Hawkins learned that he was on the team, he telephoned his mother and wept.

## BABY BABY

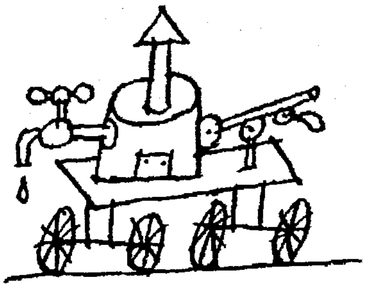
Choices have been made that I had nothing to do with—
mistakes have been made,
and, worse than that,
Death has been served tea and fresh figs.
I was not present in that room,
at the table polished with citron oil.
I did not take part in the extended discussion
whereby the decision was refined.
So don't point a finger at me someday.
I was here by the crib, looking at you
chewing your toes,
blowing raspberries,
blowing little thought balloons
with your labials, fricatives, glottal stops, and retroflexes,
your mint-condition neurons firing.
(The language can't be understood,
but the purpose is plain.)
I was here advising you that even though
all the women want to stroke you
and all the men want to be your pal
you should probably start developing

Successful athletes are inevitably displaced—if you're good, you leave home—and something is always lost in transition. Much of what Hawkins carried onto the court would have been invisible to Chongqing fans, who know nothing about Compton or American single-parent families. In Chongqing, Hawkins was simply an excellent player who looked completely different from everybody else in the city. When I lived in a nearby town, it was common for crowds of twenty or more to gather and gawk at me on the street. A local night club once hired an African dancer, knowing that his freakishness would draw customers.

Yao Ming had an excellent rookie season, and there were clear signs that eventually he'd develop into a dominant center. But the Rockets ran only about thirty plays a game to him; initially, his American fame resulted from his height and his off-court persona. He handled attention with remarkable humor and grace. He also appealed to the national missionary instinct: if Americans had failed to convert the Chinese to God and democracy, at least we were turning them into N.B.A. fans. The American media portrayed Yao as a non-threatening figure—a gentle giant.

But he entered another world whenever he dealt with the Chinese press. After a difficult defeat in Los Angeles, where Yao had fouled out for the first time in his N.B.A. career, a Chinese reporter asked what it had been like to be dunked on by Kobe Bryant. Yao said evenly, "Please don't ask me about an incident in which I have no face." At an All-Star Game press conference, Yao showed up wearing an old Chinese national team sweatshirt, and a Chinese reporter asked why. "It's comfortable, that's all," Yao said. Another reporter asked, "If you could say one sentence to all of the young Chinese players back home, what would you say?" Yao's sentence: "I don't believe that I can say very much with one sentence."

Even as they idolized him, few people in China seemed to realize how different Yao was from the typical Chinese athlete. When he played, the joy was apparent on his face. He hit free throws in the clutch, and the Rockets learned to run plays to him at the end of close games. Often, he subtly deflected the patriotic questions of the Chinese media, as if sensing that such concerns were too heavy to bear on the court.



The Chinese motivation for sport is so specific and limited—the nationalism, the sports schools—that it rarely survives a transplant overseas. Athletics has meant little to most Chinese-American communities, including the one in Houston, which has grown rapidly in the past decade. The city has an estimated fifty thousand Chinese, as well as large numbers of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam. Houston's Chinese tend to be highly educated, with an average annual household income of more than fifty thousand dollars—higher than the city's average.

The largest Asian district in Houston is along Bellaire Boulevard—a six-mile strip-mall Chinatown. In February, I spent two afternoons driving along Bellaire, where some of the signs reminded me that locals were adjusting to a new culture (All Stars Defensive Driving);

your own resources.
Popularity like that never lasts.
I was saying how difficult it is to be
courteous, loyal, thrifty,
brave, cheerful, obedient, and wise
separately, let alone all at once.
I was pointing you far into the future, to the day
you go down to the river
and wade out knee deep in the sacred element
and turn and see on the riverbank
seven luminous beings lined up and looking at you.
To which of them will you put your question
when you wade back? The Christians say
the story of the universe is the story of a boy and his dad.
They are absolutely right.
I can see that now, waiting here
for the smiles I'd kill for,
watching you as you sleep curling your fist,
which in a time I can barely recollect
did not, or maybe did, exist.

—*Vijay Seshadri*

others reflected success (Charles Schwab, in Chinese characters); and some were distinctly Chinese (a lot of beauty parlors—the Chinese are meticulous about their hair).

But I couldn't find anything having to do with basketball. Though everybody loved Yao Ming, people told me that the children in the community didn't play sports much; they were too busy studying. I searched for hours before finding a single sporting-goods store—Sports Net International, in a mall called Dynasty Plaza—and they stocked gear only for racquet sports. "The Chinese are not so interested in basketball, because of their size," David Chang, the owner, told me. "But if you're interested in Yao Ming you should talk to the people at Anna Beauty Design. They cut his hair."

Upstairs at the hair salon, a Taiwanese woman sat behind the receptionist's desk. I asked if Yao Ming got his hair cut there.

"No," she said. "Yao Ming does not get his hair cut here."

I tried again. "Does somebody from Anna's go to Yao Ming's home to cut his hair?"

"That's something I can't answer," she said coyly. A moment later, the manager walked in. "This guy's a reporter," she told him. "He wants to know if we cut Yao Ming's hair."

The manager shot me a dirty look. "Don't tell him we do that," he said.

The receptionist added, exactly five seconds too late, "He speaks Chinese."

All told, I tracked down three defensive-driving schools, six banks, and fourteen beauty salons—but no *lanqiu*. In Houston's Chinatown, it was easier to find Yao Ming's barber than a basketball.

At the end of February, the Rockets embarked on a critical East Coast road trip. Their final game was against the Washington Wizards; both teams were fighting to make the playoffs in their respective conferences, and Yao Ming was in the running to be named Rookie of the Year. This would be the final meeting between Yao Ming and Michael Jordan, who was retiring in order to return to his position as president of the Wizards.

The night before the Washington game, the Chinese Embassy hosted a special reception for Yao. Chinese food and Yanjing beer were served—the Beijing-based brewery had signed a Rockets sponsorship after Yao Ming was drafted. The Embassy's meeting room filled quickly: diplomats and émigrés, Sinophiles and market analysts. Scraps of conversation floated in the air.

"Yanjing paid six million dollars. Their distributor is Harbrew."

"Who gives a sixty-year distribution contract? But you know, from the Chinese point of view, it's a stream of production. They don't understand the concept of branding."

"He's been in China fifteen years as a value-added player."

"Actually, I'm with the White House press office."

"You know, Anheuser-Busch owns twenty-seven per cent of Tsingtao."

"There he is! Did you get a picture?"

"Imagine being that tall!"

A round of applause followed Yao into the room. Lan Lijun, the minister of the Embassy, gave a short speech. He mentioned Ping-Pong diplomacy and "the unique role sports have played in bringing our countries together." In closing, he said, "We have full confidence that China and the United States will work together to continue to improve our bilateral relations."

Yao, in a gray suit, stooped to reach the microphone. Behind him, a display case held a ceramic horse from the Tang dynasty. Red lanterns hung from the ceiling. Yao spoke for less than a minute, and he didn't say anything about Sino-American relations. "Seeing all these lanterns reminds me of home," he said softly, in Chinese. "When I was growing up, my impression of the Chinese Embassy was like a fantasy, something you see on television and in the movies."

There was a rush for autographs, and staff members hustled Yao into a back room. In the corner, a pretty Eurasian girl in a red dress was crying. Her parents said that Yao had walked past without signing her invitation. "He's her favorite player," the mother told me, adding that the girl had been adopted from Uzbekistan. A staff member took her invitation, promising to get an autograph.

Yao was at the Embassy for nearly two hours. After he left, people stood around in groups, chatting and drinking Yanjing. We had reached the Sino-American witching hour—the Chinese guests, always prompt, were gone, but the Americans lingered, in the way that Americans do. I found myself standing next to Chen Xiaogong, the defense attaché. Chen was glassy-eyed; he kept touching his watch. "I'm surprised so many Americans know Yao Ming," he said.

The next night, Kha Vo sings Francis Scott Key and Michael Jordan comes out hot. Four baskets in the first quarter: turnaround, jump shot, jump shot, turnaround. Ten days earlier, Jordan celebrated his fortieth birthday, and since then he's been averaging nearly thirty points a game. Yao works against Brendan Haywood, the Wizards' seven-foot center. Haywood looks short tonight. Six points for Yao in the first quarter; Rockets down by nine. Sold-out arena: twenty-thousand-plus. Lots of Asians—red flags in the upper levels.

Second quarter: Rudy Tomjanovich, the Rockets' coach, plays a hunch and goes with Juaquin Hawkins, who rarely sees action. Hawkins nails a twenty-footer, then a three-pointer. He draws a charge and steals a pass. Hawkins looks hungry, as if he'd just escaped from Chongqing: he hasn't scored in nine days. Moochie Norris runs the point for the Rockets. Moochie has cornrows, a barrel chest, and four Chinese characters tattooed on his left wrist: "*huan de huan shi.*" ("Never satisfied," he told me, when I asked him what it meant, and then I crossed to the other side of the locker room and asked Yao. "It actually doesn't have a very good meaning," he said. "Basically, you'll do whatever it takes to protect yourself.") Yao doesn't score in the second quarter. Jordan has eighteen. Rockets down by twenty. Halftime show: Chinese lion dance, followed by an announcement about Black History Month.

Houston sleepwalks through the third. At one point, they trail by twenty-four. In the final quarter, Maurice Taylor, a Rockets forward, starts to hit jumpers. With six minutes to go, Houston down by fourteen, Tomjanovich brings in Yao, and the game turns. Hawkins sinks a three, then knocks the ball loose from Tyronn Lue. The two players collide, and Lue falls, writhing in pain. Separated shoulder, cut eye: good night, Tyronn. Four straight baskets by the Rockets. In the final three minutes, Yao steps to the free-throw line four times, and nails everything. Haywood fouls out. Overtime.

Hawkins guards Jordan, and they trade baskets to start the extra period. Yao makes a baby hook to give the Rockets the lead. The Wizards feed Jordan every time down the court, and now, after playing for forty-five minutes, he suddenly finds new life. Turnaround jumper over Hawkins. Next possession: Jordan crossover dribble to his left; Hawkins freezes—dunk. Next possession: Jordan hard drive; Hawkins falls, no call—jumper. Next possession: Jordan drives; Hawkins lags, Yao goes for the block—goaltending. Jordan scores ten in overtime and finishes with thirty-five points and eleven rebounds. Yao has sixteen and eleven; Hawkins scores ten. In the final seconds, with the Rockets down by two, Yao gets a defensive rebound and, instead of calling a time-out, throws the outlet pass. Bad shot. Rockets lose.

After the game, in the Rockets' locker room, Hawkins sat alone on a bench. "It was frustrating," he told me, shaking his head. "He's the greatest player ever."

Yao sat in front of his locker, a towel wrapped around his waist; the Chinese media pressed close. He told them that he should have called the time-out.

In the Wizards' locker room, I joined a group of reporters waiting for Jordan. After the other players had left, he appeared behind a lectern, dressed in a gray pin-striped suit. Somebody asked if the Wizards would make the playoffs. "I've never had a doubt that we would," Jordan said.

Another reporter asked about the overtime period. Jordan talked about Hawkins: "I was going against a young kid who didn't really know how to play, and he tried a couple of flops."

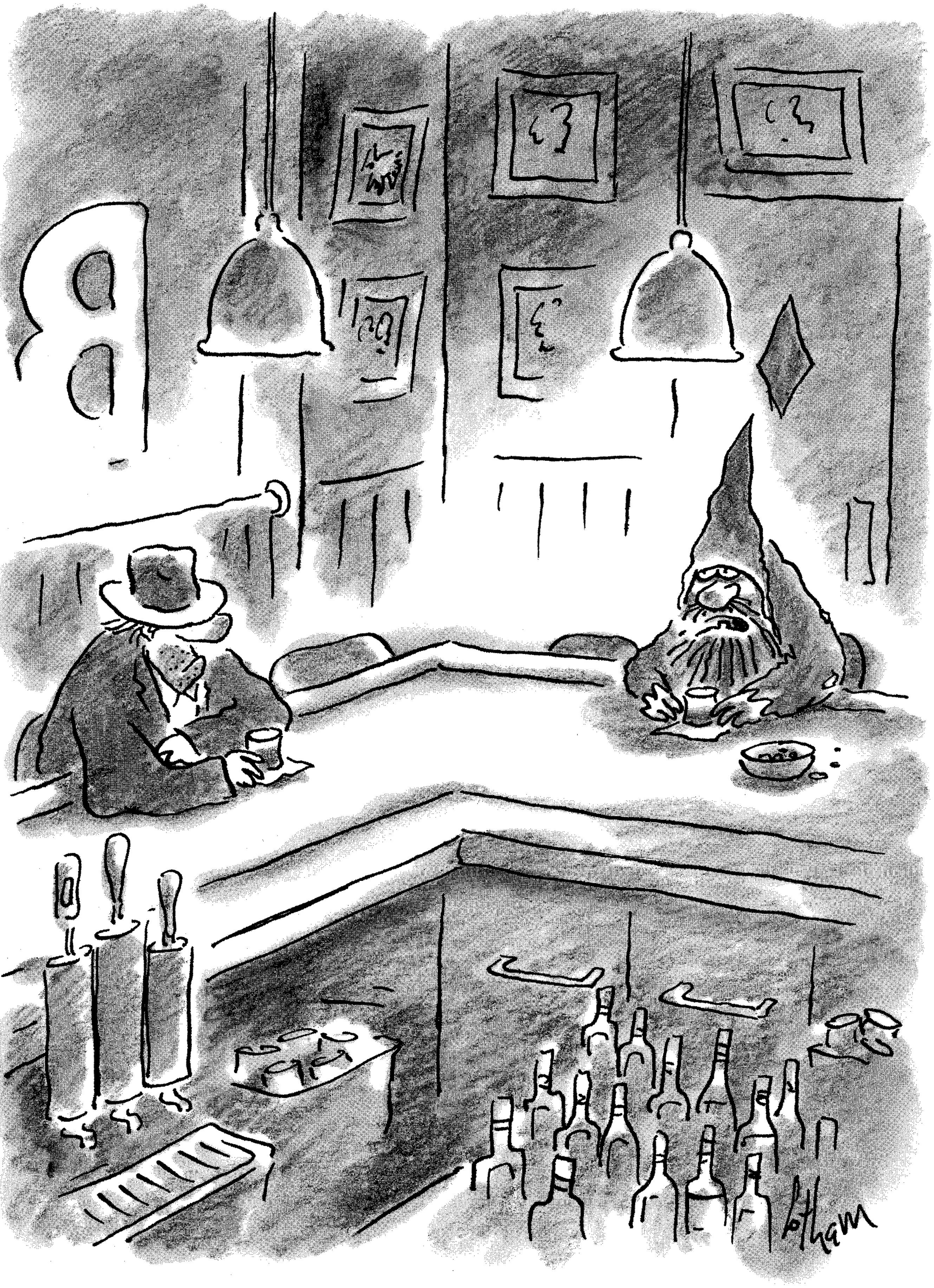
Somebody asked about Yao. "You can sit here and talk about how good he eventually could be," Jordan said. "But at some point he's going to have to showcase what everybody expects."

Jordan spoke with an athlete's bluntness; on the court, it didn't matter where the players had come from or where they were going. For fifty-three minutes, the competition was more important than everything that surrounded it. But, like so many games, this one receded into the essence of statistics—the meaningless points, the pointless minutes. In the end, neither the Wizards nor the Rockets made the playoffs. Michael Jordan never again collected thirty points and ten rebounds in a game, and in May, after retiring, he was forced out of the Wizards organization. Less than three weeks after the Washington game, Rudy Tomjanovich was diagnosed with bladder cancer, and he stepped down as coach. Yao Ming did not win Rookie of the Year. And this season Juaquin Hawkins, after failing to make an N.B.A. team, rejoined the Harlem Globetrotters.

Although it is difficult for a Chinese athlete to come to America, it may be even harder for him to return home. The most troubled transition has been that of Wang Zhizhi, a seven-one center, who emerged in the late nineties, when the Communist Party was restructuring many of its sports bureaus into for-profit entities. The Chinese Basketball Association hoped to become self-sufficient, through corporate sponsorships and income from its professional league, known as the C.B.A. In this climate, the C.B.A. has become a strange beast: its sponsors include private companies, state-owned enterprises, and the People's Liberation Army, which runs a team called the Bayi Rockets. Wang Zhizhi played for Bayi, and in 1999 the Dallas Mavericks selected him in the second round of the N.B.A. draft. For nearly two years, Dallas courted Wang's bosses, trying to convince them to let the player go. Wang was officially a regimental commander in the P.L.A.

In the spring of 2001, Dallas and Bayi finally came to an agreement, and Wang became the first Chinese to play in the N.B.A. He was twenty-three years old. In the off-season, Wang returned home, as promised, representing both the national team and Bayi. But after Wang's second N.B.A. season, in which he averaged about five points a game, he requested permission to delay his return to China so that he could play in the N.B.A.'s summer league. He promised to join the national team in time for the World Championships, in August.

The Chinese national team is notorious for its gruelling practice schedule—twice a day, six days a week. Fear



*"I miss the security of a walled city."*

shapes the routine; coaches know that they will be blamed if the squad loses, so they log countless hours and resist innovation. Before games, the Chinese men's team warms up by conducting the same rudimentary ballhandling drills that I watched the third-grade girls perform in Shanghai.

In the summer of 2002, Chinese authorities refused Wang's request and ordered him to return, but he stayed in the United States anyway. Dallas did not offer him a contract, reportedly in part because they did not want to ruin the good relationship that they had developed with the Chinese. In October, Wang signed a three-year six-million-dollar contract with the Los Angeles Clippers. Since then, Clippers games have been banned from Chinese television (N.B.A. broadcasts often draw as many as fourteen million viewers in China). The ban has turned Wang into a marketing liability—one N.B.A. general manager told me that teams are wary of signing him in the future.

Wang, whose military passport has expired, reportedly received a green card last season. Over the summer, he tried to negotiate a return to China, asking for a new civilian passport and a guarantee that he could come back to the N.B.A. after the Asian Championship. The chain of communication had grown so complicated that Wang relied heavily on a Chinese sportswriter named Su Qun to contact P.L.A. leaders and basketball officials. "I know that as a journalist I should stay out of this," Su, who writes for Beijing's *Titan Sports Daily*, told me. "But I happen to be close to Wang. We have to save him, like saving Private Ryan."

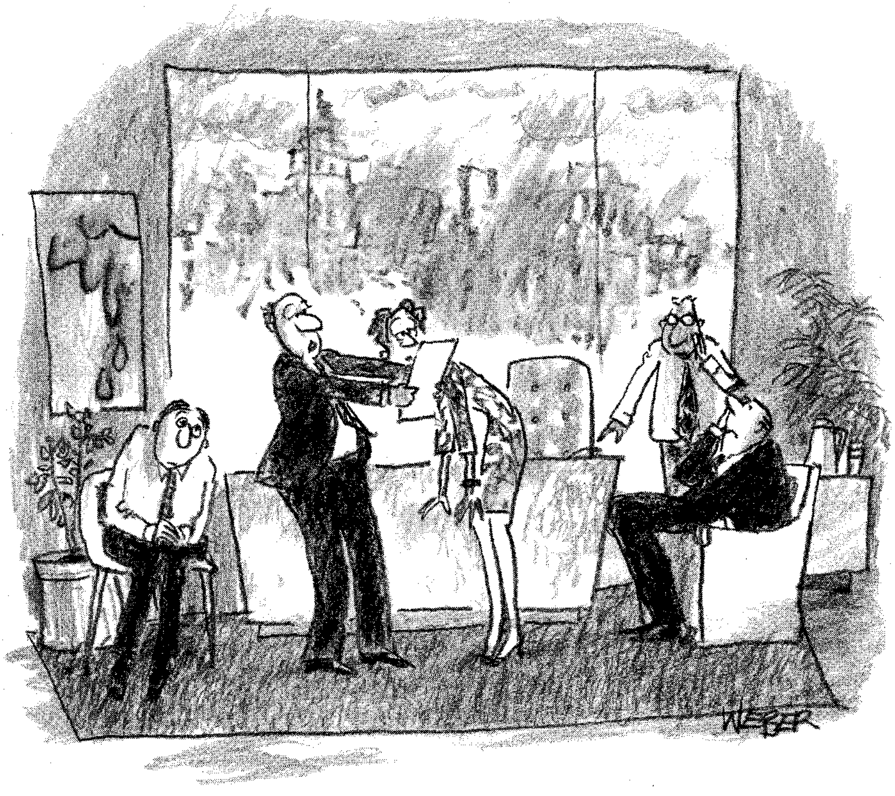
Wang, who declined my request for an interview, did not return to China. I spoke about him with Li Yuanwei, the secretary-general of the Chinese Basketball Association. "Wang has placed too much emphasis on his personal welfare," Li said. "I assured him that there is no risk. The P.L.A. also assured him. But he doesn't believe us, and he keeps demanding conditions that are not necessary. It's very sad."

Wang's problems formed a troubling backdrop to Yao Ming's move to the N.B.A. last year. Yao promised to fulfill his national-team commitments during the off-season, and he reportedly will pay the C.B.A. five to eight per cent of his N.B.A. salary for his entire career. He also will pay the Shanghai Sharks, his C.B.A. team, a buyout that is estimated to be between eight million and fifteen million dollars, depending on his endorsements and the length of his career. Yao's four-year contract with the Rockets is worth $17.8 million, and already his endorsement income is higher than his salary.

But even Yao's sponsorship potential has been threatened by the irregularities of China's sports industry. In May, Coca-Cola issued a special can in Shanghai decorated with the images of three national-team players, including that of Yao, who already had a contract with Pepsi. The basketball association had sold Yao's image to Coca-Cola without his permission, taking advantage of an obscure sports-commission regulation that grants the state the right to all "intangible assets" of a national-team player. The regulation appeared to be in direct conflict with Chinese civil law. Yao filed suit against Coca-Cola in Shanghai, demanding a public apology and one yuan—about twelve cents. The Chinese press interpreted the lawsuit as a direct challenge to the nation's traditional control of athletes.

When I spoke with Li Yuanwei, of the basketball association, he emphasized that Coca-Cola was an important source of funding, and he hoped that the company and Yao would reach an agreement out of court. Li told me that Americans have difficulty understanding the duties of an athlete in China, where the state provides support from childhood. I asked if the same logic could be applied to a public-school student who attends Peking University, starts a business, and becomes a millionaire. "It's not the same," Li said. "Being an athlete is a kind of mission. They have an enormous impact on the ideas of the common people and children. That's their responsibility."

Before I travelled to Harbin, in northeastern China, to attend the Asian Championship, I talked with Yang Lixin, a law professor at People's University in Beijing. Yang was preparing a seminar on the Coca-Cola case. "Contact with American society probably gave Yao some new ideas," Yang told me. "It's like Deng Xiaoping said—some people will get wealthy first. Development isn't equal, and in a sense rights also aren't equal. Of course, they are equal under law, but one person might



*"Our parent company wants us to be in bed by ten."*

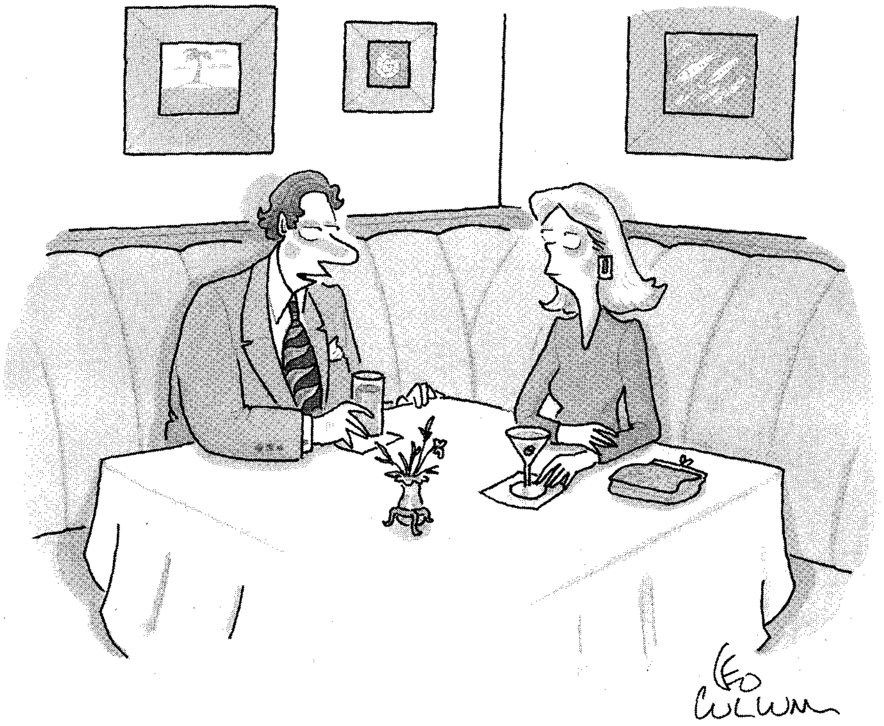
demand his rights while another does not. It's a choice. In this sense, Yao Ming is a pioneer."

Displaced people have always wandered to Harbin. During the twentieth century, they came and went: White Russians, Japanese militants, the Soviet Army. Even today, much of the architecture is Russian. Harbin's symbol is the former St. Sofia Church: gold crosses, green onion domes, yellow halos around white saints. The city has one of the last Stalin Parks in China.

At the end of September, sixteen teams arrived for the Asian Championship; the winner would qualify for the Olympics. The squads came from shadowy lands. Most of the Kazakhstan players were in fact Russians whose families had stayed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Malaysian team had a peninsular range: ethnic Chinese, Indians, Malays. Qatar's team included athletes from Africa and Canada—opponents grumbled that they had loosened the definition of a Qatari. The Syrian coach was a black man from Missouri; the Qatar coach was a white man from Louisiana. Iran's coach was a Serb who told me that his playing career had been cut short; he pulled up his sleeve to reveal a cruel scar ("Not long after that, I started coaching").

Except for the Chinese team, everybody stayed at the Singapore Hotel. Tall people in sweatsuits lounged in the lobby. The South Korean team included Ha Seung-Jin, an eighteen-year-old who is seven-three, weighs three hundred and sixteen pounds, and has basketball bloodlines—his father was once a center for the Korean national team. People expect Ha to be a first-round N.B.A. draft pick next year. The league has never included a Korean. "I want to be a Korean Yao Ming," he told me, through an interpreter (who added that the young player's nickname is Ha-quille O'Neal). Ha was eager to play Yao; everybody expected China and South Korea to meet in the final. Last year, in the Asian Games, South Korea had upset the Chinese. Ha hoped to get Yao into foul trouble. "Yao Ming likes to spin to his right," Ha said. "I'll establish position there and draw the foul."

The other seven-three player in the tournament was an Iranian named Jaber Rouzbahani Darrehsari. Darrehsari had played for only three years, since being discovered in the city of Isfahan, where his father sells fruit and vegetables in a market. Darrehsari's wingspan is more than eight feet. Once, when he was leaving the court after a game, I asked him to touch the rim of the basket. He hopped ever so lightly, and then stood still: fingers curled around the metal, the balls of both feet planted firmly on the hardwood. He was seventeen years old. He had dark, long-lashed eyes, and he hadn't yet started shaving—it was as if a child's head had been attached to an elongated body with dangling arms. In Iran's first two games, Darrehsari played only a few minutes; smaller opponents shoved him mercilessly. He looked terrified on the court. Sitting on the bench, he almost never smiled.

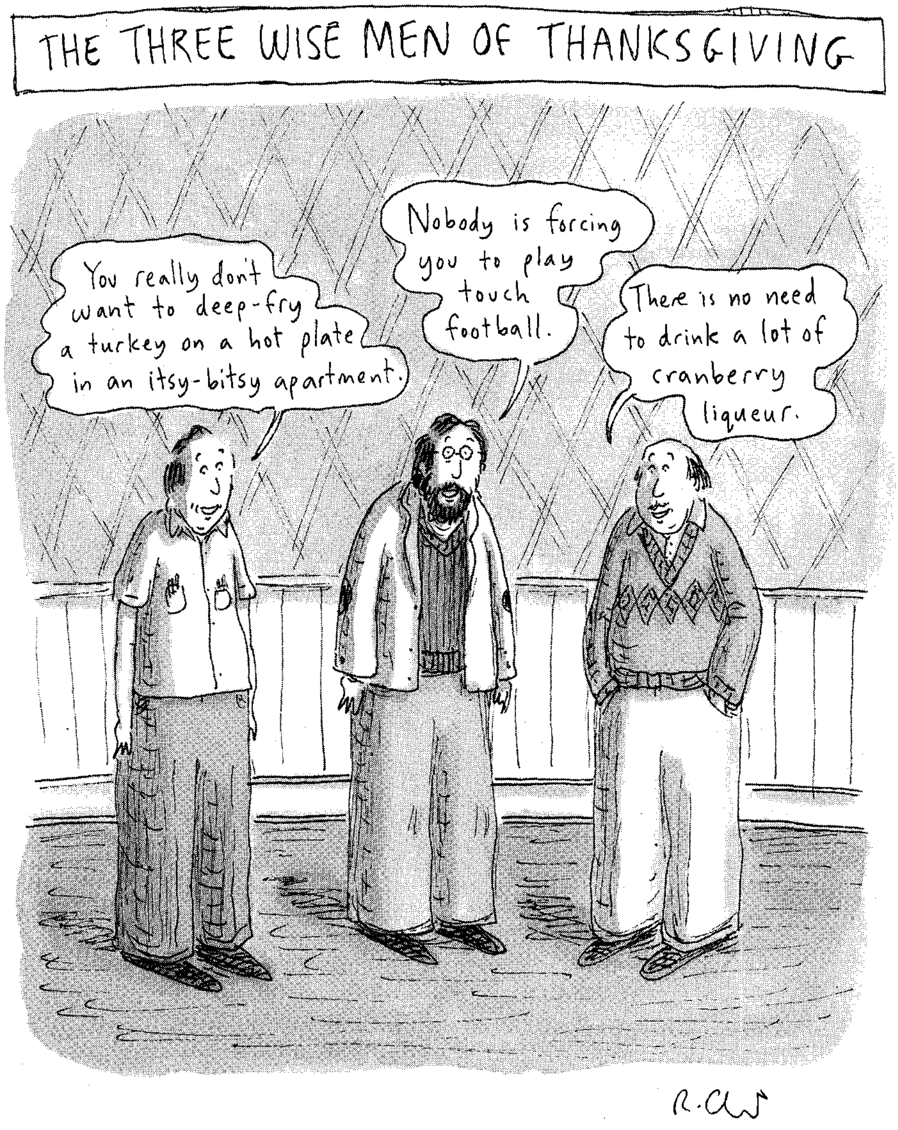


"There's something you need to know about me, Donna. I don't like people knowing things about me."

• •

The Chinese team stayed at the Garden Hamlet Hotel, a walled compound reserved for central-government leaders. All summer, Yao had been unable to appear in public without attracting a mob. In August, the Chinese media reported that a medical exam had revealed that Yao had high blood pressure. His agents said the condition was temporary, and a message from Yao appeared on his official Web site: "I have been exhausted because of the poor security at the National Team games . . . too many public appearances and commitments by the Chinese National Team, and incessant fan disturbances at the team hotel."

A few hours before China played Iran, one of Yao's agents told me that I could meet with his client. Yao is represented by an entity known as Team Yao, which consists of three Americans, two Chinese, and one Chinese-American. Half the team had come to Harbin—Erik Zhang, Yao's distant cousin and the team leader; John Huizinga, a deputy dean at the University of Chicago Graduate School of Business, where Zhang is a student; and Bill A. Duffy, who heads BDA Sports Management. They were accompanied by Ric Bucher, a senior writer for *ESPN the Magazine*, who had signed on to write the official Yao biography. A day earlier, Yao had agreed to a multiyear endorsement contract with Reebok. A source close to the negotiations told me that the deal, which is heavy with incentives, could be worth well over a hundred million dollars—


THE THREE WISE MEN OF THANKSGIVING
You really don't want to deep-fry a turkey on a hot plate in an itsy-bitsy apartment.
Nobody is forcing you to play touch football.
There is no need to drink a lot of cranberry liqueur.

potentially the largest shoe contract ever given to an athlete.

A guard let us into the compound; we walked through rows of willows, past well-kept lawns decorated with concrete deer. It was raining hard. In Yao's room, there was little sign that the shoe contract had changed his life. The shades were drawn; discarded clothes were everywhere. Liu Wei, the point guard, lay in a tangle of sheets. The only difference from the day I'd seen Yao at his hotel room in Qinhuangdao was that this time they had put the wooden cabinet at the foot of his bed.

The night before, after China had defeated the Taiwanese team by sixty points, Yao had sprained his left ankle while boarding the team bus. Now Duffy, a former player in his forties, was examining him. The ankle was slightly swollen. He told Yao to ice it immediately after that night's game. Yao answered that there was no ice at the arena.

Duffy looked up at him, incredulous. "They don't have ice?" The games were being held in a converted skating rink in a sports complex less than two hundred miles from the Siberian border.

"No ice," Yao said again, and then he spoke in Chinese to Zhang: "I've been getting acupuncture."

After a few minutes, Team Yao left the room. Yao and I chatted about the tournament, and then I mentioned that his first coach had told me that Yao didn't like basketball as a child. "That's true," Yao said. "I didn't really like it until I was eighteen or nineteen."

I asked Yao about his first trip to the United States, in 1998, when Nike had organized a summer of training and basketball camps for him. "Before then, I was always playing with people who were two or three years older than me," he said. "They were always more developed, and I didn't think that I was any good. But in America I finally played against people my own age, and I realized that I was actually very good. That gave me a lot of confidence."

He talked about how difficult it had been when he first moved to Houston ("Everything about the environment was strange"), and I asked him about the differences between sport in China and in America.

"In China, the goal has always been to glorify the country," Yao said. "I'm not opposed to that. But I personally don't believe that that should be the entire purpose of athletics. I also have personal reasons for playing. We shouldn't entirely get rid of the nationalism, but I do think that the meaning of sport needs to change. I want people in China to know that part of why I play basketball is simply personal. In the eyes of Americans, if I fail then I fail. It's *just me*. But for the Chinese if I fail then that means that thousands of other people fail along with me. They feel as if I'm representing them."

I asked about the pressure. "It's like a sword," he said. "You can hold it with the blade out or with the blade pointing toward yourself." Then I mentioned Wang Zhizhi's situation.

"There's an aspect of it that I shouldn't talk about," Yao said slowly. "It's best if I simply speak about basketball. If Wang were here, it would be good for me. I just know that if he played I wouldn't feel as if so much of the pressure was falling onto one person."

I asked about the Coca-Cola lawsuit. "I always put the nation's benefit first and my own personal benefit second," Yao said. "But I won't simply forget my own interests. In this instance, I think that the lawsuit is good for my interests, and it's also good for other athletes. If this sort of situation comes up in the future for another athlete, I don't want people to say, 'Well, Yao Ming didn't sue, so why should you?' "

No pre-game national anthems at the Asian Championship. Before tonight's game, the loudspeaker plays an instrumental version of the theme from "Titanic." The Iranians look nervous. Sold-out arena: four-thousand-plus. The stands are full of Thundersticks—they are, after all, manufactured in China—but nobody seems to know how to use them. The lack of noise feels like intense concentration. The spectators cheer both sides—enthusiastically when the Chinese score, politely for an Iranian basket.

The coach plays a hunch and starts Darrehsari. On every possession, the Iranians avoid Yao's lane, swinging the ball along the perimeter: Eslamieh to Bahrami to Mashhady. Mashhady to Bahrami to Eslamieh. Yao does not score for nearly six minutes. At last, he brushes Darrehsari aside, grabs an offensive rebound, and dunks with both hands. Tie game. Next possession: China leads. Next possession: bigger lead. Eslamieh to Bahrami to Mashhady. Somebody throws it to Darrehsari, fifteen feet out. Yao doesn't bother to challenge. The shot develops as a chain reaction across the entire length of Darrehsari's frame: knees bend, waist drops, elbows buckle, long hands snap—*swish.* Running back down the floor, he tries to fight back a smile. A few possessions later, he fouls Yao hard. Darrehsari is all elbows and knees, but for the first time in the tournament he looks like he wants to be on the court. The coach plays him the entire half. He scores four and leads Iran with four rebounds. After the halftime buzzer, his teammates clap him on the back.

Yao plays half the game: fifteen points, ten rebounds. He looks bored. China wins by twenty-four. Later, Yao tells me diplomatically that Darrehsari has potential. "It depends on environment," Yao says. "Coaching, teammates, training." For the rest of the tournament, Darrehsari does not play half as many minutes. The day after the China game, he beams and tells me, "It was an honor to play against Yao Ming."

Before the final, China Unicom unveiled its new commercial at a press conference attended by more than a hundred Chinese journalists. Scenes flashed across a big screen: the ball, the boy, the giant, the dunk. Little Fatty looked adorable. Li Weichong, China Unicom's marketing director, gave a speech. "In America, people talk about the Ming dynasty," he said. "What does this mean? Now that Michael Jordan has retired, the N.B.A. needs another great player. Our Yao Ming could be the one." The press conference ended with the theme from "Titanic."

South Korea and China played for the title on National Day—the fifty-fourth anniversary of the founding of Communist China. Ha Seung-Jin, the eighteen-year-old, came out inspired: after false-starting the jump ball, he immediately collected four points, two rebounds, one block, and a huge two-handed dunk. He also committed four fouls in less than four minutes. For the rest of the game, Ha sat on the bench, dejected.

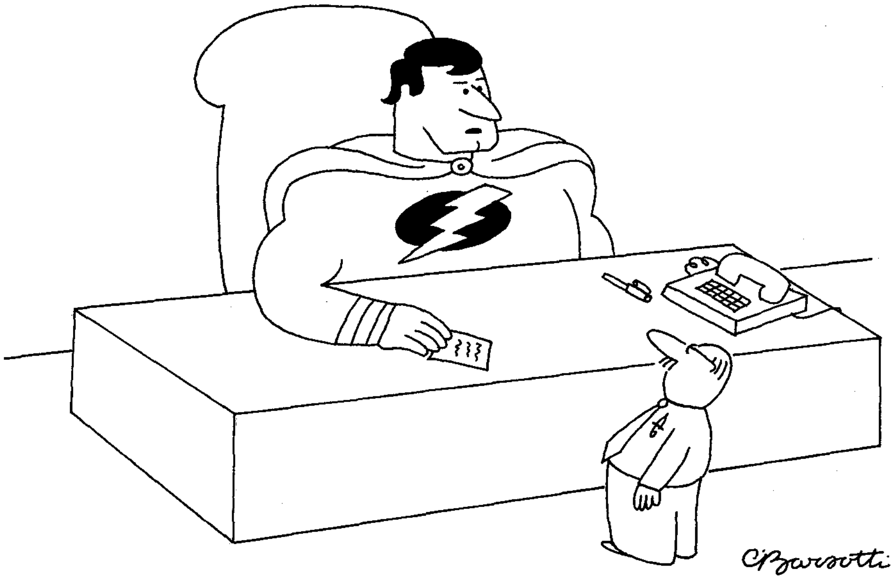
The Chinese starting point guard fouled out in the third quarter, and then the backcourt began to collapse. The Korean guards tightened the press, forcing turnovers and hitting threes: Bang, Yang, Moon. Bang three, Bang three, layup—and with five minutes left China's lead had dwindled to one point.

On every possession, Yao came to half-court, using his height and hands to break the press. At one point, he dove for a loose ball—all seven feet six inches. With the lead back at five and less than two minutes left, Yao grabbed an offensive rebound and dunked it. Thirty points, fifteen rebounds, six assists, five blocks. After the buzzer, when the two teams met at half-court, Yao Ming shook Ha Seung-Jin's hand, touched his shoulder, and said, "See you in the N.B.A."

The next morning, Yao caught the first flight out of Harbin. He sat in the front row of first class, wearing headphones. First the Indian team filed past, in dark wool blazers, and then the Filipinos, in tricolor sweatsuits. The Iranians were the last team to board, Darrehsari's head scraping the ceiling. Each player nodded and smiled as he walked past Yao. During the flight, many Chinese passengers came forward to have their tickets autographed. In three days, Yao would leave for America. Later that month, he would accept an apology from Coca-Cola and settle the lawsuit out of court.

I sat in the row behind Yao, beside a chubby man in his forties named Zhang Guojun, who had flown to Harbin to watch the game. He'd bought his ticket from a scalper for nearly two hundred dollars. Zhang was proud of his money—he showed me his cell phone, which used China Unicom services and had a built-in digital camera. Zhang told me that he constructed roads in Inner Mongolia. He sketched a map on the headrest: "This is Russia. This is Outer Mongolia. This is Inner Mongolia. And this"—he pointed to nowhere—"is where I'm from."

We talked about basketball. "Yao is important in our hearts," Zhang said solemnly. "He went to America, and he returned." Halfway through the flight, the man held up his cell phone, aimed carefully, and photographed the back of Yao Ming's head. ♦



*"Somebody in Boise needs my help. Run a credit check."*

A REPORTER AT LARGE

# THE AUTISM FIGHT

*A family with autistic children found a treatment that seemed to help. They didn't know what they'd have to go through to get it.*

BY SUSAN SHEEHAN

Regina Wagner began to realize that there was something wrong with her son Daniel when he was eight months old. He wasn't sitting or crawling, as her first child, Katie, had done at that age. Over the next year, Regina had more reasons for concern. Daniel didn't make eye contact with her or with her husband, Dan, and he didn't say Mama or Dada. Daniel's pediatrician attempted to reassure the Wagners. "Boys do things later than girls," he said. At eighteen months, Daniel said a couple of words, but he soon stopped. He did not respond to his name. He didn't like to be touched or held. He flapped his hands and feet. At the Sugar Plum Daycare Center, in Bethesda, Maryland, which he and Katie attended five days a week, Katie played joyfully with other children. Daniel remained in his own world and often bit other toddlers who came near him.

In October of 1997, three months before Daniel's second birthday, the Wagners took him to be evaluated at Georgetown University Medical Center's Child Development Center. During the evaluation, Daniel wandered around the testing room, pushing away test materials he was offered. He banged and threw blocks, instead of stacking them. Given a toy car to play with (pushing a toy car over a flat surface is considered an eight-month-level skill), he turned it upside down and spun its wheels. The testing revealed that Daniel's cognitive and behavioral difficulties were "consistent with a diagnosis of Autistic Disorder."

Parents of autistic children rarely forget the details of the day they are first given the child's diagnosis. Dan Wagner remembers asking one of the psychologists, "Are you telling me that Daniel won't be a quarterback at Harvard?" He also remembers her reply: "Well, actually, he may not graduate from high school."

Dan Wagner grew up in Montgomery County, Maryland. His father, a graduate of Harvard, was an electrical engineer; his mother was a teacher. (Both are retired.) "I'm the black sheep in my family," Dan says. "My older brother and sister are college graduates, but I dropped out of the University of Maryland to become a policeman in D.C." He married young, and has a son and daughter by his first wife. (Both children graduated from college; the son is a financial planner, the daughter a film director.) Dan, a tall, lean man of fifty-six with a full head of gray hair, is a homicide detective sergeant. He supervises a group of younger detectives, and his work hours are demanding and always changing.

Regina, a pleasant-looking woman of thirty-eight with brown hair and brown eyes, was raised on Manhattan's Upper West Side. While attending law school at Catholic University, in Washington, she worked as a part-time law clerk at the United States Attorney's office, and met Dan when they worked together on a case. "I never liked dating men my age," she says. After Regina and Dan were married, she took a job as an assistant state's attorney for Montgomery County, where they settled.

The Wagners' third child, Grace, was born a few weeks before Daniel's evaluation at Georgetown; she was a much easier baby than Katie (who had been clingy) and Daniel (whom Regina described as "a lump" during his first few months). Grace looked directly at her parents and smiled. She crawled early and walked early. At twelve months, however, she still wasn't speaking. Three months later, she, too, was given a diagnosis of autism.

## DIAGNOSIS

In 1943, Leo Kanner, a psychiatrist at Johns Hopkins University, wrote a paper in which he vividly described eleven children with severe social, communication, and behavioral problems, including extreme aloofness and indifference to other people. He applied the term "early infantile autism" to these children. The medical profession was slow to embrace Kanner's term. As late as 1968, the scientific literature was still using the label "childhood schizophrenia."

Kanner originally believed that bad parenting played a role in the origin of autism. He later changed his mind, but other physicians subscribed to the bad-mother theory long after Kanner discarded it. When autism was diagnosed in Daniel Wagner, Regina was devastated by the implication, which still lingered in the psychiatric literature, that she was somehow to blame for his condition.

The person who was best known for putting the onus on "refrigerator mothers" was Bruno Bettelheim, the director of the Sonia Shankman Orthogenic School at the University of Chicago from 1944 to 1973. After his death, by suicide, in 1990, some of his former patients, now adults, asserted that they had been physically abused by Bettelheim while in his care.

In 1956, a psychologist in San Diego named Bernard Rimland and his wife, Gloria, had their first child. The Rimland baby screamed and resisted being held in the nursery of Mercy Hospital from the day he was born, and kept screaming and resisting throughout his infancy. The prevailing psychogenic theory of autism made no sense to Rimland: he and his wife hadn't had a chance to do any parenting. In 1964, Rimland published a book called "Infantile Autism," in which he concluded that autism was not caused by bad parenting but was an organic disorder with a strong genetic component. The book played a significant role in changing the world's perception of autism. Today, autism is accepted as being a complex developmental disorder of the brain that interferes with the brain's normal development.

Autism is considered a "spectrum" disorder. Among the disorders on the spectrum are classic autism, the diagnosis that both Daniel and Grace Wagner received, in which children suffer from a triad of symptoms (impaired social interaction, a delay in or a total lack of spoken language, and difficulty with motor skills); Pervasive Developmental Disorder—Not Otherwise Specified (P.D.D.-N.O.S., also known as atypical autism), in which a child has some but not all of the deficits associated with autism; and Asperger's syndrome, which is characterized by average or better-than-average language skills but impaired social skills. Autism is four times more common in boys than in girls; Asperger's is ten times more common in boys.

Because of the medical community's long-standing fixation on bad parenting, biomedical research was neglected for decades. Only a few researchers were seriously focussing on autism in 1994, when the National Alliance for Autism Research was established and became the first non-governmental organization committed to biomedical research on the disorder. Last week, federal officials convened a national conference in Washington to unveil an ambitious ten-year plan to address the problem. Among its many goals, the program will provide funding to help identify the disorder's genetic and environmental causes, provide better services for children suffering from it, and train therapists to better help them.

Recent studies suggest that autism spectrum disorders occur in an estimated one in every two hundred and fifty children. Ten years ago, the number was thought to be one in twenty-five hundred. Theories attempting to explain the increase range from citing improved diagnostic tools and public awareness—children once considered "eccentric" might now be labelled autistic—to blaming environmental factors. Much attention has been focussed on the possible role of childhood vaccines as a precipitating factor; a recent Danish study found no evidence for that theory.

Autism is believed to involve between ten and fifteen genes. There is currently no in-utero test for autism, as there is for Down syndrome. There is no simple dietary intervention for autism. Every few

years, new miracle treatments for autism have been touted—and subsequently discredited. Some parents are proponents of "floortime" (getting down on the floor and playing with the child, letting the child take the lead in playing) and others of having the child swim with dolphins, but no studies on the efficacy of such treatments have been published. So far, only one study has provided any real hope for parents.

In the late nineteen-seventies, a Norwegian-born psychologist named O. Ivar Lovaas began a study at U.C.L.A. on sixty autistic children. Children in the study's experimental group received forty hours a week of an intensive, highly structured form of behavior modification called Applied Behavioral Analysis. The therapy was administered by student therapists trained at U.C.L.A. The parents were also trained in therapy, so that supplementary treatment could continue for most of the children's waking hours. Children in two control groups received only ten hours of therapy a week, with no supplemental parent training.

The study was published in 1987. The children in the three groups were compared at the ages of six and seven. Nine of the nineteen children (or forty-seven per cent) in the experimental group completed normal first-grade classes and were promoted to the second grade. In contrast, only one of the forty-one children (or two per cent) in the two control groups was placed in a normal first grade and promoted to a normal second grade.

The theory behind Applied Behavioral Analysis rests on the assumption that autistic children have inefficient neurocircuits—specifically, connections that are not as efficient as those found in normal children. In normal children, a connection may go from A to B, but in the autistic brain the connection may go from A to C to D to E before finally reaching B. Inefficient connections result in more "noise," which is believed to hinder social and cognitive development. Lovaas's therapy takes advantage of the brain's ability to adapt and be retrained. When people learn a particular skill, such as throwing a baseball, they are reinforcing neurocircuits that are specific to that skill. When autistic children are taught a specific behavior through constant repetition, the therapy is training the neurocircuits to respond in a certain way and somehow teaching the brain to receive these signals, which would otherwise be drowned out in a sea of noise. In order to be effective, Lovaas has stressed, A.B.A. therapy must be started early, must be sufficiently intensive, and must be carried out in part by the parents.

Gahan Wilson

*"Maybe you're overdoing the scarf thing."*

## TREATMENT

The children Daniel bit at the Sugar Plum Daycare Center had complained to their teachers and parents, and Regina Wagner knew that he would soon be asked to leave the school. She decided to quit her job to care for Katie, Daniel, and Grace at home, while also devoting her time to obtaining A.B.A. therapy for Daniel. It is probably fortunate that she had no idea of what lay ahead.

Regina learned of a private non-profit organization, Community Services for Autistic Adults and Children (CSAAC), which provides A.B.A. therapy to young children with autism. Daniel was evaluated by CSAAC (pronounced "sea-sack") in December of 1997 and recommended for the program. Regina then approached the Montgomery County Infants and Toddlers Program, which provides services and funding for autistic children under three years old. She was told that Daniel, instead of receiving funding for A.B.A. therapy, would be eligible for forty-five minutes of speech therapy, forty-five minutes of play therapy, and forty-five minutes of occupational therapy (skills like holding a cup and scribbling with a crayon), for a total of two and a quarter hours of therapy every week.

Believing that the success of A.B.A. is contingent on early intervention, the Wagners decided to hire a special-education lawyer to file an administrative complaint seeking to get Daniel into the A.B.A. program right away, and borrowed ten thousand dollars from Regina's parents for the attorney's retainer fee and for the initial work he did. The Wagners' suit began in February, 1998, and lasted until August, 1999. During that time, Daniel received only an hour or two of weekly speech-and-language therapy for six months; the costs were paid for by Dan Wagner's insurance. A speech-language pathologist said that Daniel had improved in his ability to "imitate" words and phrases—that is, to repeat words in a parrot-like manner without appearing to understand them. As for actual speech, at home Daniel usually said just one word—it sounded like "wah" to Regina—but he sometimes babbled.

Life in the Wagner household was dismal. Daniel often spent eight hours a day dangling a piece of string in front of his eyes. Sometimes he put the string in his mouth. He screamed if it wasn't precisely the way he wanted it, and he screamed when his parents took it away. The Wagners never gave Daniel string. He fabricated his own—by tearing threads off a towel, a blanket, or a carpet fringe. He also tore up books, putting the torn pages in his mouth, making spitballs out of them, and sticking the spitballs on the television screen. "I hated it when Daniel destroyed books," Regina says. "I bought the same books again and again for Katie to read. They meant something to her."

When Regina tried to go out with Daniel, he flung himself on the pavement. He kicked and scratched her when she tried to pick him up. If the Wagners did get their children to a playground, Daniel screamed if he was put on a swing or a slide. He preferred to sift endlessly through the pieces of cedar mulch below the equipment.

Sometimes Regina couldn't get Daniel into his car seat, because he arched his back and flailed; on more than one occasion, she had to cancel his doctor's appointments. Once, when Dan, Regina, Katie, and Daniel were waiting to check out at a Home Depot, the cashier ran out of change. Daniel started to scream and to punch himself in the face. Other customers glared at the parents. Regina felt terrible.

The Wagners couldn't eat at McDonald's, and because Daniel was intolerant of waiting it was often hard for them even to order food at a drive-through window. "I became a prisoner in my house," Regina says. "Dan had to do most of the grocery shopping. He soon knew which supermarkets were open until midnight and which were open all night."

It was hardest for Regina when Dan, with his rotating job schedule, was working the midnight-to-8 A.M. shift. As Daniel got older, he became more violent toward Regina, and he started to bang his head against a wall. He rarely slept through the night. He often woke up between 2 A.M. and 6 A.M. and wanted to watch television. "He would grab my fingers and slam them against the TV," Regina recalls. "When I refused to turn it on, he bit me and pulled my hair and scratched me and kicked me. I had to call Dan at work. He told me to stay calm. He promised me he'd let me take a nap after he got home and before he went to bed for a few hours."

Regina suffered from sleep deprivation and from her son's remoteness. "Daniel had no real idea who I was," she says. "He treated me like a piece of furniture. He imitated the words of the 'I Love You' song from 'Barney & Friends,' but he didn't know what the words meant. He never said, 'I love you, Mommy.' "

In May of 1998, three months after the Wagners brought suit to obtain Applied Behavioral Analysis therapy for Daniel, an administrative-law judge ruled against them. On January 19, 1999, while an appeal of that ruling was pending, Daniel turned three. The Wagners sought funding for A.B.A. therapy from Montgomery County Public Schools, which is responsible for educating children from ages three to twenty-one. The school district agreed to fund an A.B.A.-therapy program for Daniel through CSAAC. By then, however, the CSAAC program was full, and Daniel was put on a waiting list. He could not start A.B.A. until August of 1999, the same month the Wagners learned that they had lost their appeal. The Wagners now owed the special-ed lawyer an additional twenty thousand dollars.

On Tuesday, August 31, 1999, Regina and Dan Wagner wheeled Daniel's stroller into CSAAC's offices in Rockville, Maryland, for an initial three-hour workshop. The CSAAC team included a psychologist, a special-ed teacher, and several therapists, including a twenty-year-old woman named Bonnie Dayhoff, who had been administering A.B.A. therapy since she was sixteen and a junior in high school.

A significant part of A.B.A. therapy is conducted with the therapist sitting in a child's chair facing the child. Daniel was told to "sit down." It took three therapists to get Daniel into a chair. Once seated, he was told to stand up, which required the therapists' help. The "sit down" command was given a second time. Daniel was again "prompted" into the chair—the therapists helped place him in it. Each small step in A.B.A. is repeated and prompted until the child masters the step; then the physical prompts are gradually phased out.

Another step was to get Daniel, who tended to slouch in the chair, to "sit good." He was inclined to fidget, and was told to keep "hands quiet." He was praised for "good sitting" and for "quiet hands," and he was rewarded. The reward might be an M&M, a cracker, or the chance to play with a toy. Daniel had seen an Elmo Guitar on "Sesame Street" and there was one in CSAAC's clinic room. Someone gave it to him and he appeared interested in it. "One thing Daniel really had going for him was that he was easy to reinforce," Bonnie Dayhoff recalls. "He wanted certain objects. And, when we all clapped for him, he looked around the room. He clearly liked applause. Not all autistic children care."

After Daniel had a brief break, a therapist demanded his attention by saying, "Look at me." He was praised for "good looking." A three-piece puzzle was put on a table between the therapist's chair and Daniel's. The therapist handed him one piece of the puzzle, a pig, and said, "Put here." She took his hand and showed him where to put the piece. This was repeated a number of times. Each time Daniel put the piece in the wrong place, she again demonstrated where it went. When he put the piece in its correct place, she praised him and rewarded him with a treat. Daniel likes sweets and was willing to work for M&M's. After he put the first pig in correctly, he picked up the second piece, a pig of a different color and shape, and put it in correctly, and did the same with the third pig.

"I could tell from the first day that A.B.A. was going to work for Daniel," Regina says. "He responded to structure. He seemed eager to learn. He lit up like a light bulb when he did the puzzle. He had never done this before. I was so happy I was practically crying."

Because Daniel had "receptive" language (he could understand words spoken to him) but negligible "expressive" language (he could speak only a few words, such as "All gone" and "No more"), CSAAC's goals for him in the 1999-2000 academic year included knowing and saying the letters of the alphabet, numbers, and the names of colors.

In September, CSAAC began to send therapists it had hired and trained to the Wagners' home. Four young women came for morning and afternoon sessions with Daniel for an average of thirty-six hours a week for a year. Dan

Wagner built a therapy room for Daniel in the basement of the Bethesda town house where the Wagners were then living. At first, Daniel resisted entering the room and sometimes tried to escape, pulling the therapists' hair, hitting them, and scratching them—but he soon became more willing.

At the beginning of each session, Daniel was told to "sit down" and was reminded to sit properly. He was helped with the puzzle. He was praised. "So smart," "Very good," or "Wow," the therapists said, and they clapped, and they rewarded him with candy. Everything Daniel was taught was repeated a number of times in a session, and during subsequent sessions. Each therapist recorded Daniel's correct and incorrect responses to each skill that was attempted.

Daniel's "behaviors" were also recorded. He was easily distracted and often threw himself on the floor, perhaps to try to avoid therapy: it was the first time in Daniel's life that demands had been made on him. The therapists are trained to avoid making eye contact with children who are "tantrumming." It is hoped that, if the child learns that disruptive behavior brings no rewards, his tantrums will diminish and perhaps stop. If the child quiets down, he is praised for "good quiet." It is believed that autistic children rock, spin, or stare—or, in Daniel's case, fixate on a string, make spitballs, and twirl the tails of toy animals—in order to stimulate themselves, because they don't find appropriate behavior sufficiently engaging. Many autistic children continue to "stim" for months or years, but the behavior in some who do well in A.B.A. tends to decrease, as Daniel's did, at least while he was involved in therapy. Initially, his behavior improved outside therapy. "Daniel independently went into the therapy room to do a puzzle and called 'Mommy' so that I would come and look at it," Regina says. "I called Dan at work to say, 'He did it!' I could see glimmers of a child coming out of a dense fog."

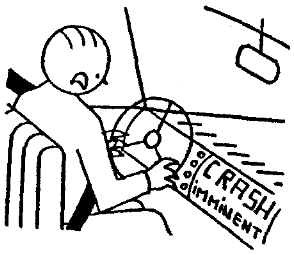
Compliance is also a tenet of A.B.A., and Daniel slowly became more coöperative. After six months, he was less aggressive with the therapists, he responded to the "come here" instruction between sixty and ninety per cent of the time during a session, and he had fewer tantrums—an average of seven a week.

As the therapy progressed, Daniel quickly learned to say simple words. When a therapist told Daniel what a ball was, or a boat, or a cat, he was able to say the words clearly—and he didn't forget them. At the end of his first six months, he began to respond to the question "What is it?" not just by saying "Ball" but by saying, "It's a ball." He had more trouble pronouncing words with more difficult blends; for example, the "br" in "bread." His progress in receptive and expressive language skills was described in a February 23, 2000, report as "tremendous."

By then, Daniel was able to snap beads to one another, stack rings, and complete wooden puzzles of up to ten pieces. He knew all the letters of the alphabet. He was gradually acquiring abstract concepts. After the therapists taught him the words "triangle," "rectangle," "circle," and "square," and put two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes on the therapy table, he was able to "put with same." Daniel learned hundreds of nouns and was proficient at putting them in correct categories—animals with animals, and vehicles with vehicles. "Not all autistic children learn so fast and not all are able to generalize," Regina says.

Therapy moved from Daniel's therapy room to other rooms in the Wagners' house. Daniel was able to use his words spontaneously to request some items he desired. He often said, "Want apple juice, Mommy," and, still more often, "Want computer." Daniel had first seen a computer in the office at the Sugar Plum Daycare Center and had been attracted to the mouse, which he didn't need to be taught how to use. He and Regina shared a computer—Daniel had seen her send countless e-mails to lawyers and subsequently to CSAAC personnel. He was able to do kindergarten-level computer programs when he was four.

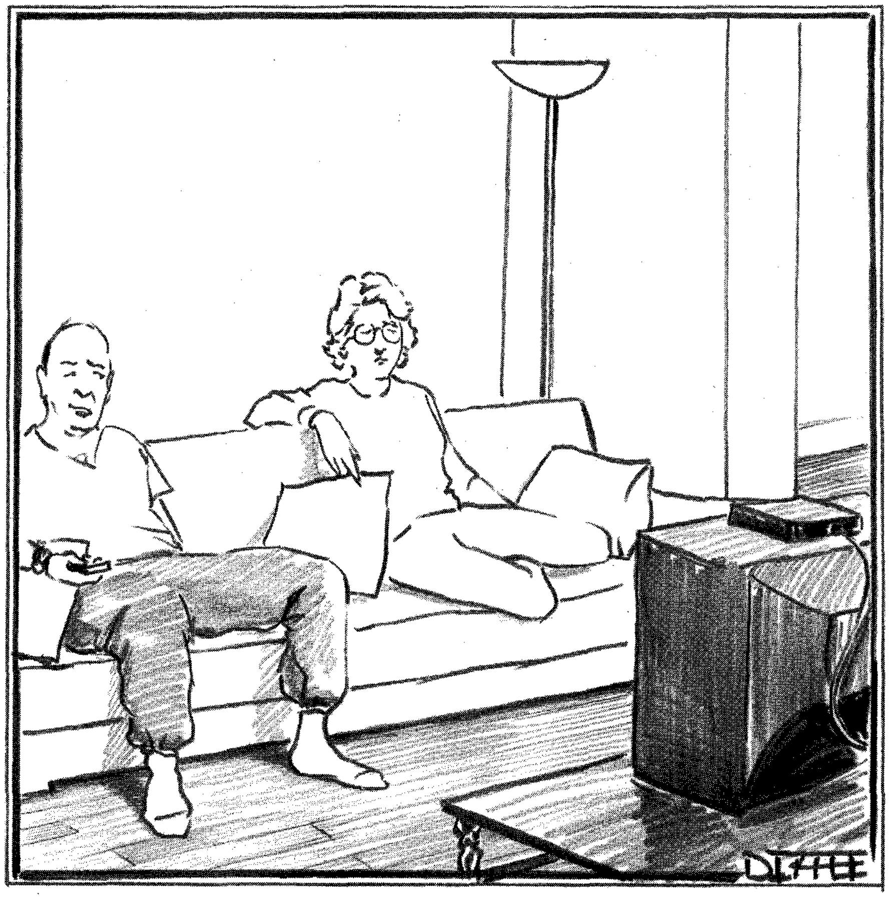
Daniel's therapy also moved outside. When the therapists first started to take him on walks, he would try to run into the street, or "body drop," falling to the ground, or kick and scratch. Eventually, he learned that if he walked a few steps without throwing a tantrum he would receive M&M's. After a few weeks, he walked. That meant he could go out of the house—and that Regina and Katie and Grace (in her stroller) could go out of the house—and to the playground. After several months, Daniel was able to go down a slide alone. And he was so occupied with the six hours of daily therapy that he often forgot about the string, and he was tired enough afterward to sleep through the night, and let his parents sleep.



At first, Katie Wagner was merely disappointed and embarrassed by having an autistic younger brother. Daniel couldn't be disciplined, for fear that he would bang his head or punch himself in the face, so Katie felt it was unfair for the Wagners to discipline her when she was naughty. Katie didn't want to go out in public with the family because of Daniel's strange behavior, and she couldn't invite friends to the house. The only easy hours of Katie's day were those she spent in school. After the family learned that Grace was autistic, Regina found Katie huddled in a corner one day. "Am I going to catch autism?" Katie asked. The Wagners took Katie to see Dr. C. T. Gordon, a pediatrician and child psychiatrist who specializes in evaluating and treating autism. Dr. Gordon assured Katie that autism was not contagious. Katie later wrote a letter to Dr. Gordon urging him to "hurry up and cure autism before the sun goes down."

The Wagners were devastated by Grace's diagnosis and by their inability to start a treatment for her immediately. At the beginning of 1999, Grace was eighteen months old. Over the next year, she acquired no speech and went from being a sweet baby to being a wild toddler.

In April of 2000, the Wagners drove to a hotel in Parsippany, New Jersey, for a dinner to celebrate the seventieth birthday of one of Regina's aunts. The guests were seated at round tables for ten. Katie had a nice time with her cousins, and enjoyed the filet-mignon dinner, but Regina and Dan had no opportunity to eat. Grace and Daniel wouldn't sit down. Grace ran from table to table, spilling the contents of the saltshakers into the guests' water goblets. The birthday cake was on a display stand. Before it was cut, Grace put her hand in it, scooped out a piece of cake, and ate it. Daniel ran into the kitchen, where there were many pots filled with boiling water, and was chased out. The Wagners had to keep removing both children from the dining room.



*"Looks like the new Tarzan was raised by personal trainers."*

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While Grace was still two, the Wagners learned that Montgomery County's Infants and Toddlers Program might be willing to pay for offering A.B.A. to some autistic children under the age of three, and they applied for Grace. CSAAC offered her what is known as a "workshop"-model program. The Wagners would hire her therapists, and subsequently be reimbursed by Montgomery County. Grace began therapy on July 31, 2000, six weeks before her third birthday.

Grace resisted therapy more than Daniel did, but she did not have to be taught how to play with toys: she stacked rings; she stirred the pots on the toy stove in the therapy room that Dan had added to the basement for her, separate from Daniel's; she played with dolls. Language was far more difficult for Grace; at three, she had just started to talk. She "stimmed" less than Daniel, and showed more affection to people she knew and liked. But Grace was more ritualistic. She lined things up, and insisted that they be in a particular order—her order. She would line up the food on her plate. While being bathed, she would line up the washcloth, the shampoo, and the soap on the side of the tub. "Everything had to be just so," Regina recalls.

One goal of A.B.A. therapy is to enable autistic children to attend a regular school and go to classes with "neurotypical" children. In September, 2000, Daniel began attending a private nursery school in Bethesda three afternoons a week, paid for by the Wagners. His classmates were three at the start of the school year. Daniel was four, and turned five in January. It was believed that younger children would be more likely to accept a child like Daniel, who was so obviously different. CSAAC provided a "shadow" for him—a therapy aide who drove him to school and helped him, as unobtrusively as possible, follow the teacher's instructions. She prompted him to behave appropriately. In addition to ten hours of shadowing, CSAAC continued to provide Daniel with about twenty hours a week of A.B.A. at home.

At five, Daniel was reading. "He could read 'War and Peace' and some of my law books, because he quickly grasped the rules of phonics," Regina says. "He didn't understand them. He could read and understand age-appropriate children's books." When Daniel was asked to read a story to the class, he did. He sometimes played with blocks and in the playground. Even so, he seldom interacted with his classmates. He often didn't eat the snacks that were served (although he recited the blessing perfectly at snack time); he wasn't inclined to color pictures during coloring time; he needed prompts to stay in line and to wait for his turn. CSAAC had started a toilet-training program for Daniel in August, but it was, by and large, unsuccessful. Daniel also threw frequent tantrums in school, as he continued to do at home and on outings to places like malls.

"Transitions are tough for autistic children," Bonnie Dayhoff says. "When it came time for Daniel to leave places he particularly enjoyed, like toy stores, he carried on. Once, when I was on an escalator with Daniel at the mall, he body-dropped. I put my back out to get him safely off the escalator."

With Grace occupied in her basement therapy room and Daniel and Katie at school, Regina finally had several hours at home to cook, clean, and do laundry. She had learned in the spring, to her surprise, that she was pregnant. In November, her doctor ordered her to bed; it appeared that the baby might be premature. The births of Katie, Daniel, and Grace had been happy. The mood in the labor room on December 1, 2000, the day George Wagner was born, was sombre. If a family has one autistic child, the chances of having another are between five and six per cent, and the Wagners already had two autistic children. After George's birth, Regina had a tubal ligation.

In the spring of 2001, Bonnie Dayhoff quit. She loved the work and accepted its hardships—she had scars on one arm from a boy who bit her a year after she began doing therapy—but the salary was low. She wasn't given time to eat lunch. Two clients lived forty-five minutes apart, and she had twenty minutes to get from one home to another. In a short period of time, she received three speeding tickets and was in three fender benders. She took a job with a psychiatric-rehabilitation agency. The therapy aides CSAAC subsequently hired for Daniel were less experienced. There were fewer of them, and, to Regina's dismay, Daniel's hours of A.B.A. were sharply curtailed.

Many therapists are college students majoring in psychology who have an interest in special education and are willing to work for low wages to gain experience. One of Grace's best therapists graduated in the spring of 2001 and moved to another city. Regina couldn't easily recruit replacements. When Grace's hours of A.B.A. were also cut back, her behavior became worse. In May, she threw a chair at a therapist, bit a therapist's ear, and threw a therapist's eyeglasses on the floor. She scratched Dan's face badly as he was putting her in her car seat. She scratched and kicked her mother often, especially when Regina was trying to dress her or was holding or nursing George. Grace avoided Daniel, because she had discovered that if she went after him he would retaliate, but she tried to bite, scratch, and kick Katie. She paid scant attention during her therapy sessions and was often "nonresponsive." She lost some of her previously mastered words and skills. She pronounced most of the words she had learned incorrectly, saying "boo" for "book" and "wan" for "want." (Most children do this initially; some autistic children persist in doing it.) She silently took people's hands when she wanted them to do something for her that she could do for herself.

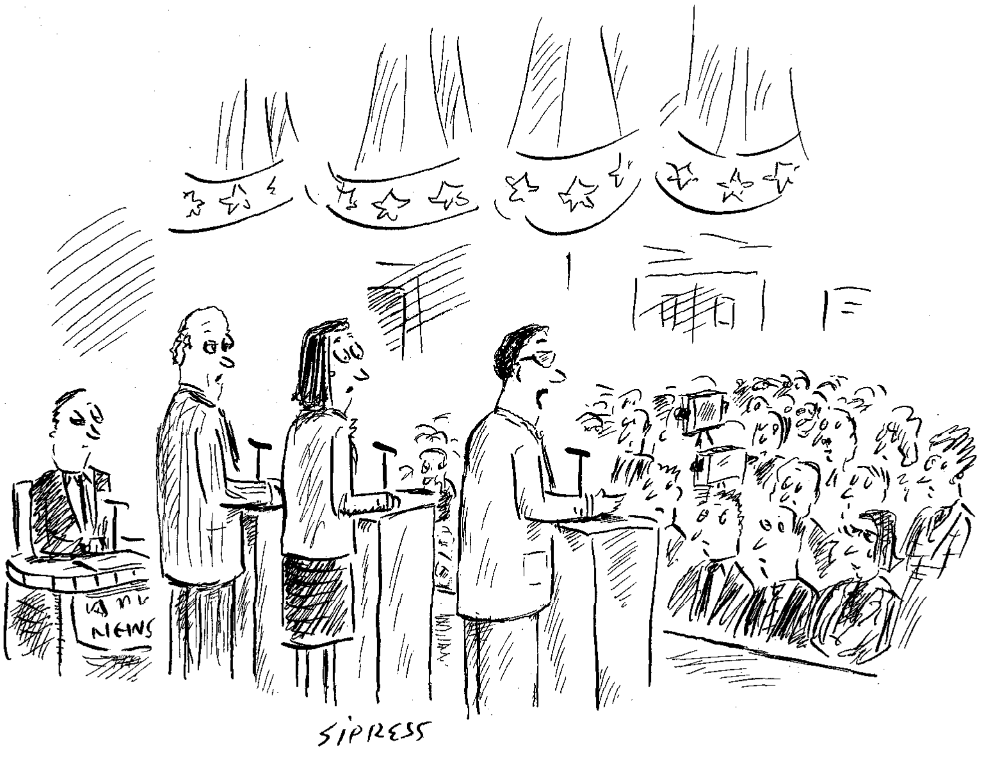
Like many parents of autistic children, the Wagners had no social life. They didn't give dinner parties or go to dinner parties. They didn't go to movies. Regina couldn't attend Katie's after-school activities.

The Wagners' town house in Bethesda was small, and the children were disturbing the neighbors. In the spring of 2001, the Wagners decided to move to a detached house, with a large yard, in Potomac, Maryland, eleven miles away. Regina found a school near Potomac, the Mill Creek Nursery School, which would accept Grace into a Monday-Wednesday-Friday afternoon class and Daniel into a Monday-to-Thursday afternoon class. Daniel was five, but Regina and CSAAC felt that he needed another year of preschool before attending regular kindergarten.

The new home in Potomac had three bedrooms and two bathrooms on the second floor. The first floor had a separate dining room and living room, a powder room, and two small rooms off the kitchen, added by previous owners, which soon served as therapy rooms. Like most autistic children, Daniel and Grace do not understand danger. Dan Wagner had to install locks high up on the outside doors so that the children couldn't reach them, even if they stood on chairs. Grace also suffers from pica, a tendency to eat substances like banana peels, sand, Play-Doh, and coffee grounds. If Regina makes coffee and doesn't empty out the grounds immediately, Grace eats some and makes mud pies with the rest on the kitchen floor. She climbs on the kitchen counter and helps herself to whatever she fancies—raw rice, salt, bouillon cubes. The Wagners' television set was housed in an entertainment center. It had shelves on the bottom. Grace used the lower shelves as if they were a ladder to get to the top. She fell off the entertainment center when she was three, breaking her clavicle. Dan replaced the shelves with cabinets that have lockable doors. In the living room of the Potomac house, a sectional sofa met in a corner. Grace's spot was on top of the sofa cushions, in the corner. She climbs because she apparently likes high perches.

Not long after Dan repainted the town house, Grace took a permanent black marker and scribbled on every wall of the living room–dining room; he had to repaint. In the Potomac house, Dan wallpapered the upper part of the living room and painted the lower walls. After Grace watched the video of "The Lion King," she scratched the walls. She had seen Mufasa clawing at the cliff after Scar pushed him off, and was apparently imitating him. Explanations of Grace's behavior must always be speculative: she cannot answer questions beginning with "why."

The Wagners have a lock on their refrigerator. There is a lock on their bedroom door,



*"Let me be vague."*

so that Daniel and Grace do not enter and toss all the clothes out of the dressers or go into their bathroom. Grace regularly makes the sink, toilet, and tub in the children's bathroom overflow; Dan's tasks include patching the kitchen ceiling, below, every few months.

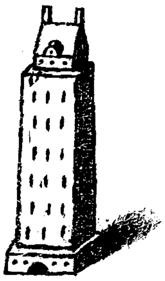
## LITIGATION

In the spring of 2001, Regina exchanged friendly e-mails with CSAAC's psychologist in charge of both Daniel's and Grace's programs. On April 6th, the psychologist e-mailed her, "Boy . . . do we make a good team." But then, according to Regina, CSAAC began to lose therapy aides, and the number of therapy hours Daniel was receiving declined. In the following months, as a Maryland judge later put it, "a serious and irreconcilable rift" developed between the Wagners and the CSAAC administrators and staff.

Shortly before Daniel and Grace were to start attending the Mill Creek school, Regina learned that the therapist CSAAC would be providing as Daniel's "shadow" wouldn't be able to drive him to school on Tuesdays and Thursdays, because a morning client lived in another county. Grace's therapy aide couldn't drive Daniel, because the children were too likely to pull each other's hair in the back of her sedan, and Grace tended to bolt out of a car unexpectedly, requiring one's full attention. Dan Wagner rearranged his work schedule and drove Daniel to school two afternoons a week, waiting outside in the parking lot until Daniel's shadow reached the school.

It was especially important to Regina that Daniel attend Mill Creek; she hoped that he would be able to improve his behavior and social skills so that, with a shadow, he could enter kindergarten the following fall. He would need to sit still in a chair and on the floor, during circle time; to take turns; to answer questions; and to speak to his classmates.

When the CSAAC psychologist informed her that in 2001-02 Daniel would not be entitled to transportation provided by the agency, Regina objected, and she complained about other aspects of the program—about the scheduling of clinic meetings for Daniel at CSAAC, and home consultations for Grace, for example. Now that Regina was no longer practicing law, she was entirely focussed on obtaining treatment that would result in Daniel's being like the fortunate ones in the best-outcome group of Dr. Lovaas's original study—those nine children out of nineteen who had been able to attend school with other first graders and who had been promoted to second grade. When she believed her efforts were being thwarted, she sent numerous e-mails to CSAAC's personnel and frequently telephoned. Apparently, CSAAC's employees became worn out by Regina's persistence. And they may have been piqued by another act on Regina's part.



CSAAC is one of eleven sites in the United States and in other countries that are replicating the original Lovaas study. Other parents had complained about CSAAC's cutbacks in therapy, but only Regina decided to complain to Ivar Lovaas himself. In September, she e-mailed him about her problem with CSAAC. He e-mailed back that he had communicated with a CSAAC director. A week later, CSAAC made a complaint of its own—not to the Wagners but to the Montgomery County Public Schools district.

In a letter dated October 3, 2001, the CSAAC director and Daniel's psychologist expressed "serious concerns" to the school district about the appropriateness of the CSAAC program for Daniel. The letter alleged that over the previous two years the Wagners had failed to spend sufficient therapy hours with the children—only "6 hours (total) of therapy, out of the required 1,000 hours." It alleged that Regina herself had stated that she was unable to provide any therapy hours. It also alleged that the Wagners had failed to provide essential materials for Daniel's program, that the Wagners' transportation problems had hindered the scheduling of meetings, and that the Wagners had failed to participate in required training sessions. The letter recommended that Daniel's treatment be undertaken somewhere with "more comprehensive services, that will enable him to learn in a more structured environment." Neither CSAAC nor the school district informed the Wagners of the letter—a serious violation of procedure. The Wagners learned of it long afterward. On October 9th, the CSAAC psychologist sent Regina a letter saying she would no longer communicate with her by e-mail.

By November, Regina was writing to the CSAAC director to express further concerns: Daniel's conversation program had not been updated in a year; his toilet-training program had stagnated; all of Daniel's senior staff had recently left the program, and no one who had experience with Daniel could train newcomers. Daniel was repeating the same drills rather than moving on. Regina notified CSAAC that she and Dan planned to videotape Daniel's therapy sessions, so that CSAAC could see the evidence for itself. On November 14th, CSAAC informed the Wagners that it would not consent to videotaping, and told them that all services to Daniel would be discontinued pending a previously scheduled meeting between the Wagners and CSAAC on November 28th.

The purpose of the meeting, which was mandated by law, was to devise an Individualized Education Program, or I.E.P., for Daniel. The I.E.P. has been described as the "cornerstone" of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, initially passed by Congress in 1975. The impetus for the act was public concern about the widespread practice of school systems' relegating handicapped children to private institutions or warehousing them in special classes. To combat such exclusionary practices, the act mandates that all children with disabilities receive a "free appropriate public education" and that children with disabilities be "mainstreamed"—educated with non-disabled children—to the "maximum extent appropriate." For each child, an I.E.P. is to be developed that is, in the words of a 1982 Supreme Court decision, "reasonably calculated to enable the child to receive educational benefits."

At the November 28th meeting, the Wagners learned that the school district had recommended that Daniel attend a special classroom program for students with autism spectrum disorders at Maryvale Elementary School in Rockville, Maryland, effective immediately. Two days later, the Wagners visited Maryvale. There were eighteen autistic children in three classrooms. The program offered Daniel only twenty weekly hours of A.B.A.; there was much less one-on-one therapy; some of the kids were screaming. Daniel tends to imitate bad behavior, and the Wagners feared he might do so. In the Wagners' opinion, Daniel had made great gains since 1999 as a result of one-on-one A.B.A. therapy. They believed that he had also benefited from having attended private nursery school with normal children. "Maryvale was in every way a change for the worse, one we felt sure would cause irreparable harm to a verbal autistic child like Daniel," Regina says.

Tension in the Wagner household had escalated during the weeks before CSAAC stopped providing services to Daniel. Regina and Dan Wagner began taking Prozac. On October 31, 2001, they had brought Grace and Daniel to see Dr. Gordon, the autism specialist; he had prescribed for both children the antipsychotic drug Risperdal, which is more customarily given to those suffering from schizophrenia. In small doses, it had a calming effect, which made the children more receptive to therapy. One of Risperdal's side effects is weight gain. Grace, a delicate child, remained slender. Daniel, more solidly built, soared from fifty pounds to ninety-nine pounds.

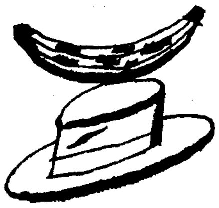
Daniel had stopped attending nursery school when CSAAC suspended his services, putting him in limbo. When Grace picked up her red book bag and left for school three times a week with her shadow, Daniel yelled, "I want school!" and banged his head on the floor and against the wall. He spent most of his time on the computer, rewinding videos, or twirling the tails of his stuffed animals. "It was the worst period of my life," Regina says. "It was worse than getting the original diagnosis. Daniel thought he was being punished and he had no idea why."

The Wagners informed the school district that they thought that Maryvale was inappropriate for Daniel. A few weeks earlier, before the I.E.P. meeting, a placement specialist at the school district had recommended the Lovaas Institute for Early Intervention (known as LIFE), in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, which runs workshop programs based on Lovaas's A.B.A. research. LIFE serves some children in Maryland for whom CSAAC lacks sufficient personnel. The placement specialist had assured the Wagners that both children could easily be switched from CSAAC to LIFE. The Wagners now informed the school district that they would pursue the LIFE program for Daniel.

The district told the Wagners to enroll Daniel in Maryvale or file a due-process complaint with the courts. At one point, the district sent the Wagners a letter saying that if Daniel did not attend Maryvale or some suitable private institution or home-schooling program the district would notify "Protective Services."

The Wagners applied for due process. They still owed twelve thousand dollars to the lawyer who had tried to get Daniel into an A.B.A. program before he turned three. They were fortunate to find a major Washington law firm to take their case on a pro-bono basis. Once they had filed for due process, a "stay put" order was supposed to go into effect. The reasoning behind "stay put" is that a child ought not to be deprived of an education while his parents are appealing a decision of the public schools to place him somewhere else. Daniel was supposed to begin receiving services from CSAAC, because that is what he had been receiving before the dispute. CSAAC did not provide any services for Daniel.

The case of Daniel Wagner v. Montgomery County Public Schools began before an administrative judge in the county on February 14, 2002. Twenty-six hundred pages of testimony have been given—by the Wagners and by past and present CSAAC personnel, and others. The school district argued, as CSAAC had in the October 3rd letter, that the Wagners had been unable to handle two highly demanding home-based A.B.A. programs. At the same time, it argued that the views in the letter had not influenced its behavior at the I.E.P. meeting—a contention the judge found unconvincing. According to law, the Wagners should have been informed of the letter because the school district had based its placement decision on information in the letter, without giving the Wagners a chance to answer CSAAC's charges. The Wagners maintain that they did provide the required hours of weekly therapy, and denied CSAAC's other charges.



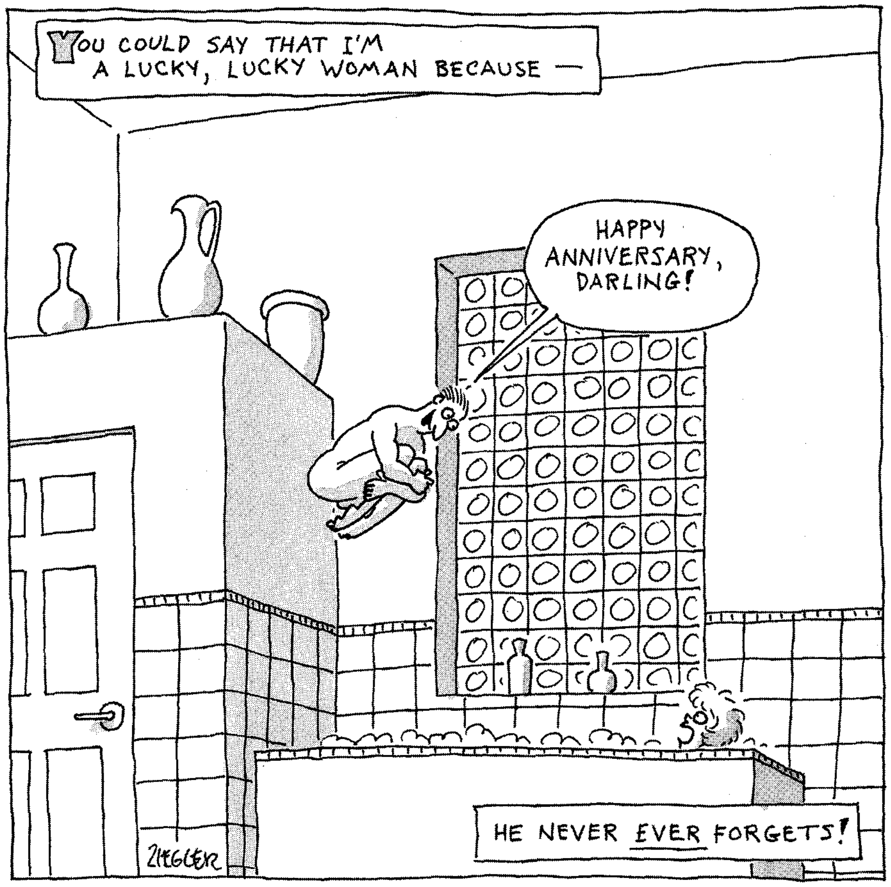
Because CSAAC never resumed the court-ordered services to Daniel, the Wagners also went to federal district court, where, in April of 2002, Judge Deborah K. Chasanow ruled that Montgomery County must provide Daniel with a stay put that did not involve CSAAC, because CSAAC had "utterly failed to recognize their obligations to Daniel." In June, Judge Chasanow ruled that the LIFE program would be Daniel's stay put. On June 20th, Daniel began a LIFE home program. Grace had entered a LIFE program two months earlier.

Daniel's progress advanced more rapidly under LIFE's consultant than it had under CSAAC's staff, and so did Grace's. In the fall of 2002, the Wagners hired Bonnie Dayhoff, who had quit the job she had taken after leaving CSAAC, because she preferred doing A.B.A. therapy. They also hired a woman named Noel Bingham to work with their children forty hours a week. Noel, a recent graduate of Catholic University, had met the Wagners when she was working part-time for CSAAC in 2001.

On September 9, 2002, Daniel went to kindergarten at Potomac Elementary School. While he was at school, the vice-principal telephoned Regina to say that Daniel would not be allowed to attend the school again. The district still insisted on Maryvale. The Wagners' attorney called Judge Chasanow and requested an emergency hearing by telephone. Judge Chasanow ruled that Daniel must be allowed to attend Potomac Elementary School. Daniel returned to kindergarten on September 17th. Grace began her second year of nursery school at Mill Creek. Noel or Bonnie usually gave Daniel and Grace therapy in the morning and shadowed the children in the afternoon.

During his first four days at Potomac Elementary School, Daniel required constant prompting from Noel or Bonnie: to hang up his backpack; to greet his teacher, Kit Noonan; to initiate contact with other children; to choral-count how many students were present. Still, in early October, when someone from the school district asked Ms. Noonan to prepare a report on the suitability of Daniel's placement in her class, she wrote that he was adjusting well. At first, he had had to leave the room a couple of times a day, in order to "get himself together"; now it was necessary about once a week. Although he wasn't yet ready to follow through on multistep directions, she could work with Daniel after she got the other students going. Daniel "is responsive to me, sweet, and kind. I enjoy working with Daniel. I do not think I could manage all 18 students without the help of Daniel's shadow." Ms. Noonan told the Wagners that she was not permitted to give Daniel a standard report card. It took the Wagners two and a half months to obtain a copy of Ms. Noonan's report on their son from the school district.

Meanwhile, Daniel learned the names of all his classmates, played "hot potato" with them, and when he was asked by another child to "Sit down next to me" he did. He was invited to a birthday party for the first time. The party took place at Jeepers!, a local chain of party and play establishments designed for young children. Daniel played on the bumper cars and the roller coaster, took his turn hitting a piñata, and, according to the birthday child's mother, enjoyed himself.


YOU COULD SAY THAT I'M A LUCKY, LUCKY WOMAN BECAUSE —
HAPPY ANNIVERSARY, DARLING!
HE NEVER EVER FORGETS!
ZIEGLER

On November 2nd, the Montgomery County administrative-law judge ruled on the due-process hearing that had begun nine months earlier, in which the Wagners asked that Montgomery County be required to pay for the LIFE program. "Their challenge to the Maryvale placement was not the typical scenario, where the school offers one program and the parents prefer a different program that they think is better for their child," Kerry Edwards, the Wagners' lawyer, says. "The school district itself determined that Daniel's special-education needs require more intensive services than can be provided in a special-education classroom like Maryvale, and authorized funding for a home-based A.B.A.-therapy program for the 2000-01 school year, and again for 2001-02. When the school district's contractor, CSAAC, stopped providing services to Daniel in November of 2001, the district, instead of simply approving an alternate provider to continue the A.B.A. program that Daniel's intensive needs required, placed him into the Maryvale special-education classroom in the middle of the school year without any transition."

The judge, however, wrote that he had been impressed by testimony from the school district's autism specialists as to Maryvale's competence to administer A.B.A., and, following the precedent set by the Supreme Court in 1982, he ruled, "There is no requirement that the state provide a child with the best education—public or private—that money can buy, nor is the state required to maximize the potential of the student. All that is required is that the disabled child benefit educationally from the program." He did not consider the question of why the school district had ended Daniel's home program, and made no determination regarding the merits of the CSAAC accusations against the Wagners. The case is now under appeal.

## FLIGHT

In mid-December, after Montgomery County had failed to reimburse LIFE for six months, LIFE stopped sending its consultant to the Wagners' house and to Daniel's school. On January 15, 2003, an I.E.P. meeting was held for Daniel that was attended by Scott Wright, the executive director of LIFE. At the meeting, which lasted for eight hours, the county recommended that Daniel be placed in Maryvale. Wright recalls the occasion as one of the most contentious I.E.P. meetings he has ever attended. He didn't think the Wagners would ever be able to get the services their children needed while they were living in Montgomery County.

The toll inflicted on the Wagners by what Katie Wagner calls "too much autism" is in turn reflected on the therapists who work for them. Noel Bingham left the Wagners' employ in late March. After her departure, Bonnie Dayhoff couldn't take both children to school for their afternoon classes, so one of them often missed school. She couldn't give each child as much therapy as she had when she and Noel were both working full time. Shortly before Mother's Day, the children in Daniel's class at Potomac Elementary School made picture frames out of tongue depressors sprinkled with sparkles. All the other children in the class had had their photographs taken. The children were given the photographs to put in the frames; the framed photographs were to be a gift for their mothers on Mother's Day. Daniel was the only child whose photograph had not been taken.

In June, Dan Wagner shadowed Daniel to school for a few days. On June 5th, Dan got into an argument with the principal and the assistant principal about the school's failure to give the Wagners report cards for Daniel. Dan decided that his son would not return to the school for the last two weeks of the term.

On June 9th, Dan called Bonnie Dayhoff, who three days earlier had worked with Daniel and Grace until eleven o'clock at night, and informed her that her services would no longer be needed. Bonnie has telephoned the Wagners many times, but they haven't returned her calls. She feels hurt by the way the family terminated her services.

Sometime that spring, the Wagners, without telling anyone, had decided to leave Maryland and move to New Jersey. "Once you litigate against Montgomery County, you have a black mark against you," Regina said recently. "I was afraid that the county would soon start trying to send Grace to Maryvale." Regina was also concerned about George, who appeared to be speech-delayed. "The county claims I can't handle two A.B.A. programs. They would never give me a third. We need to start over somewhere else. I've got to believe there are school districts that will be more willing to fund A.B.A. programs and to enable me to mainstream Daniel." Dan would commute to his job in Washington, and continue working the double and triple shifts that provided overtime pay.

One hot and humid Saturday before they departed, Dan Wagner worked the day shift and returned home around four o'clock. The family climbed into their white van and Dan drove to a Best Buy. The computer mouse was broken and Daniel was edgy—he fidgeted, he wailed, he kept repeating the words "I want computer, please" in a robotic tone. Katie wanted some new DVDs, and Daniel wanted a particular DVD about dinosaurs. In May, Daniel had broken a lock to gain entry to the Wagners' hundreds of DVDs and had stacked them up, scratching many. At Best Buy, Dan selected a mouse. Daniel was upset that the dinosaur DVD wasn't in stock, but he didn't throw himself down on the floor, as he would have several years earlier. Katie easily persuaded her parents to buy two Kimba videos for her. She asked Grace to please, please, pretty please request a Goofy DVD, which Katie wanted. Grace didn't appear to understand what Katie was saying and gave Goofy only a sidelong glance. Grace was wearing her favorite article of clothing—a bathing suit. Her face and back were reddened and purpled with her mother's lipstick and Chanel eyeshadow: Grace had discovered where they were that morning and had applied them liberally. She tilted her head and smiled a slightly crooked smile at her reflection in the screens of a number of television sets that were tuned to the same program, and from time to time she recited passages from songs and nursery rhymes. On the way home, the Wagners played a Beatrix Potter CD. "Sixteen, please," Daniel repeated, in an increasingly distressed monotone. "He knows the numbers of his favorite tracks on most of our CDs," Regina explained. The sixteenth track was replayed. Back in the house, Dan connected the new mouse for Daniel, who was soon upstairs using the computer quietly. George had napped through the Best Buy outing and remained asleep. Katie began to watch the first of the Kimba DVDs. Grace watched, wandered off, and returned.

The Wagners' house was uncharacteristically tidy, because they would have to sell it in order to buy one in New Jersey. There were a few plastic toys on the floor, but no children's wet or dirty clothes, no discarded hamburger buns, chips, or juice boxes. The dining room was bare, with only a table and chairs in its center. Many of the family's belongings were in large storage containers in the yard. Grace's therapy room was almost empty.

There were still a few of Daniel's and Grace's toys in Daniel's therapy room, but the floor was covered with packed boxes. Grace had opened a couple of boxes containing bottles of bubbles, spilling the sticky liquid, so some things had to be thrown out and some boxes had to be repacked.

After taking a nap, Dan began to repaint Daniel's bedroom, while Regina prepared dinner. She put a strip steak for Katie and cheeseburgers for herself and Dan and Grace into a frying pan. "Katie does without so much that she would have if she had normal siblings, so she's the only one who gets a steak," Regina said. She heated about twenty chicken nuggets and two types of potatoes. The family sits down to dinner together on Thanksgiving, but on this Saturday, as on virtually all other nights, they ate separately. Regina and Dan had cheeseburgers and potatoes in Daniel's room while Dan continued to paint. Katie ate part of her steak in the living room in front of the television set. She left most of it on the plate, because she thought it was too gristly. Grace ate her

## AMERICAN KESTREL

I see you sitting erect on my fire escape,
plucking at your dinner of flayed mouse,
like the red strings of a harp, choking a little
on the venous blue flesh and hemorrhaging tail.
With your perfect black-and-white thief's mask,
you look like a stuffed bird in a glass case,
somewhere between the animal and human life.
The love word is far away. Can you see me?
I am a man. No one has what I have:
my long clean hands, my bored lips. This is my home:
Woof-woof, the dog utters, afraid of emptiness,
as I am, so my soul attaches itself to things,
trying to create something neither confessional
nor abstract, like the moon breaking through the pines.

—*Henri Cole*

cheeseburger at the dining-room table, and from time to time nibbled on green Play-Doh from its container and applied another color to her face. Regina had put a plate of cheese and crackers on the table. George climbed up and ate all the crackers, one at a time. When the family orders take-out Chinese, he eats eggrolls and moo-shu pork. Daniel eats only foods that are tan or yellow. Regina handed him a plate with all the chicken nuggets, and he went upstairs to eat them at the computer.

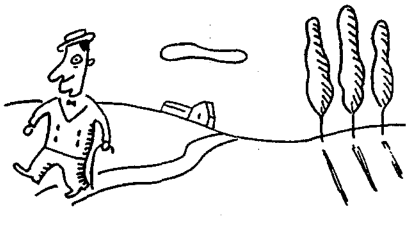
For one whole year, Regina had prepared casein-free, wheat-free food, because she had heard that such a diet was beneficial to autistic children. She made healthful chicken nuggets from scratch, but Daniel would not eat them, even when they were presented to him in a McDonald's box. Regina is prone to migraine headaches. She didn't have a migraine during the casein- and wheat-free year, but the diet didn't make the children less autistic, so she went back to cooking as she had always done.

When Daniel came downstairs, he was wearing a T-shirt but no boxer shorts: he finds clothes uncomfortable and strips as soon as he gets home. He saw Katie watching the first Kimba DVD. "I want Kimba, please," he said. "No thank you" was his response to her offers of other DVDs. Eventually, Regina came back downstairs. She wanted to check her e-mail and told Daniel he could then go online. "I want Teletubbies dot com, please," he said. Once there, he clicked onto his favorite link—the Teletubbies' animal parade—and replayed a snippet two dozen times. He went back downstairs and asked Katie for "Kimba, please." Katie had finished the first Kimba, so she handed him the DVD and began to watch the second. When Regina went upstairs a few minutes later, she found Daniel naked and in obvious need of the toilet: she got him to the bathroom just in time. Grace took a bath and went to bed first. The family had slept late that morning, and the other children weren't asleep until after midnight. Regina put a video called "Nighty Night" on the living-room television set. "It features classical music and is supposed to get kids to sleep in twenty minutes," she said. George yelled, "Five, four, three, two, one!" at the top of his voice, and shrieked a few times, but was comforted when Regina said "Oh, George" to him in a soothing tone for perhaps the fiftieth time that day, and he nodded off. She carried him up to his crib. Daniel fell asleep suddenly on the living-room floor. When Regina woke him up, he walked quietly up the stairs with her and got into his bed. Before she went to sleep, early on Sunday morning, she read a few pages of a magazine. At the end of each day, she tries to remove herself from "the reality of too much autism."

The Wagners moved in late August. They bought a nineteenth-century house with five bedrooms. In the Potomac house, Katie had to sleep on the living-room sofa. Katie now has a bedroom on the third floor; she reaches it by way of her own staircase and can lock the door. Her Beanie Babies and books and Magic Markers are now out in the open, safe from the younger kids.

The town to which the Wagners moved is more amenable to funding A.B.A. programs than Montgomery County. In some towns in New Jersey, decisions are made by individual townships, rather than by counties, and autistic children have a better chance at mainstreaming than in larger jurisdictions. Property taxes are considerably higher. According to the *Times*, even in New Jersey, where annual costs for the state's two hundred and eighteen thousand special-education students are at least twenty thousand dollars a year (the cost for ordinary students is about ten thousand), school boards and administrators "are increasingly raising a once-taboo subject: saving money in special education by saying no to parents who demand a private placement and offering them special in-house programs" like the one Montgomery County offers at Maryvale.

So far, the I.E.P. meetings that the Wagners have attended have been cordial. Both Daniel and Grace have been getting their forty hours a week of A.B.A. and shadowing. Daniel has been attending first grade with his shadow since early September. He leaves school before the end of the day, because he is not ready for subjects like social studies, and because he needs time for A.B.A. He is still robotic. His medication has been changed from Risperdal to Abilify, a newer drug. The transition has been more difficult for Grace, who didn't start attending kindergarten with one of her therapy aides until the end of October and is reluctant to sleep in her new bedroom, preferring to sleep on the sectional sofa that was her perch in Potomac. Grace has a good memory. When she sees someone for the first time in months, she greets the person by name, and gives her a hug and a kiss. George, who is about to turn three, has been diagnosed with P.D.D.-N.O.S.



The litigation in Montgomery County is ongoing. "We moved away, but maybe we can keep some other family from being run out of town," Dan says. Although it has taken a toll on the family, Regina and Dan believe that having Daniel and Grace in a regular school has been worth the struggle; if they hadn't litigated to get Daniel into kindergarten the previous year, he would have fallen further behind. There is no evidence in the literature to suggest that having one or two autistic children per classroom is detrimental to normal children, and many people believe that exposure to children who are autistic teaches tolerance.

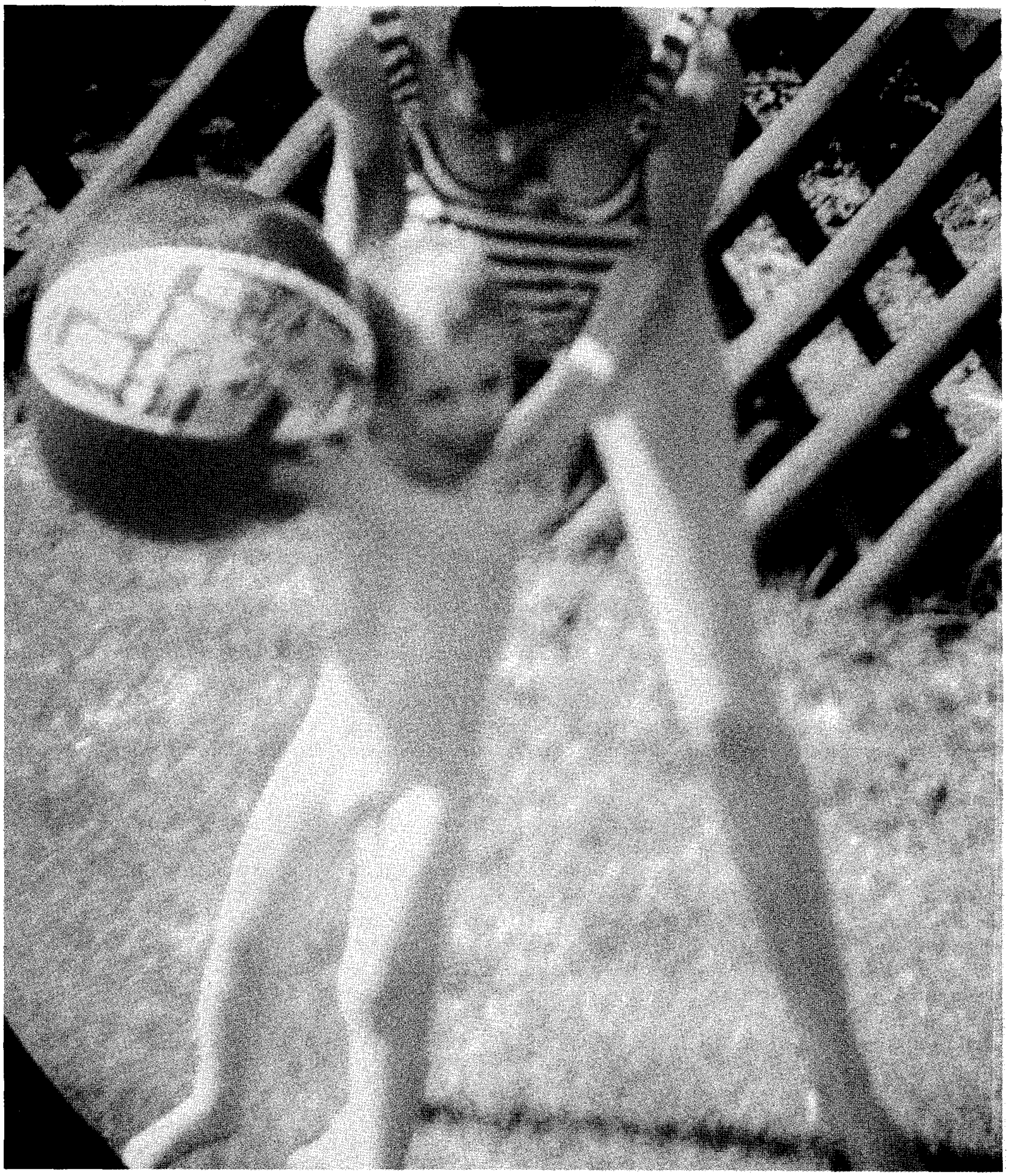
Daniel recently received his first report card, and his parents are proud. "Having Daniel get a report card is a reward for all his hard work," Regina says. "It's a big deal. What an achievement for a child with his disability. And his teacher gave him a part in the Thanksgiving play. He's going to recite a poem."

The school doesn't give letter grades. Instead, report cards rank students' work as either Proficient, Making Progress, or Needs Reinforcement. Daniel got some good marks, but he received a Needs Reinforcement in "Orally responding to questions about stories." The Wagners and the therapy aides are working with him on that skill. "We just started teaching him 'why,' " Regina says. "We tell him, 'Touch the sky.' He says, 'No, I can't.' We ask him, 'Why?' He answers, 'Because it's too high.' That's the 'Why Because' program. We introduced it a week ago." ♦

FICTION

# SUNSTROKE

BY TESSA HADLEY



The seafront really isn't the sea but the Bristol Channel: Wales is a blue line of hills on the other side. The district council has brought sand from elsewhere and built a complicated ugly system of concrete breakwaters to keep it in and make the beach more beachlike, but the locals say it'll be washed away at the first spring tide. Determined kids wade out a long way into soft brown silt to reach the tepid water, which barely has energy to gather itself into what you could call a wave. It's hard to believe that the same boys and girls who have PlayStations and the Internet still care to go paddling with shrimping nets in the rock pools left behind when the tide recedes, but they do, absorbed in it for hours as children might have been decades and generations ago.

It's a summer day with the same blue sky and unserious puffs of creamy cloud as on the postcards. The high street is festive with bunting and flowers; the toy shops have set out their metal baskets of buckets and spades and polythene flags; the cafés are doing a good business selling cream teas and chips. There are a lot of people holidaying in Somerset this year. Pink-skinned in shorts and sunglasses, with troops of children, they buy locally made ice cream, they visit the steam railway kept open by enthusiasts, they change twenty-pound notes into piles of coins and lose them all in the machines in the amusement arcades. Not so long ago, these old seaside resorts seemed to have been passed over forever, left to the elderly by people rushing to take their vacations abroad. But thanks to the newfound reluctance to fly they are popular again. Now the tourists are congratulating themselves: with this weather, who needs to go abroad, who wants to?

Across the road from the beach are the Jubilee Gardens (that's Victoria's Jubilee, not the recent one), where there's a putting green and even a bandstand, though today there's no band. Two young women have established a messy family camp of bags, cardigans, plastic water bottles, and discarded children's tops, half in and half out of the dappled shade of some kind of ornamental tree that neither can identify—although both, lying back on the grass, have stared dreamily up into the delicate lattice of its twigs and leaves, stirring against the light with an effect like glinting water. The children (they have three each) wheel in and out around their mothers' center, wanting drink, money, kisses, indignantly demanding justice. The women hardly interrupt their conversation to dole out what's needed, to open up their purses, issue stern ultimatums. They talk, sometimes across the heads of the youngest ones, curled up hot and heavy in their laps, sticky tears pressing crumples into their summer dresses. The baby dozes in her pushchair, and later lies on a blanket blinking up into the tree, responding with little jerks of her arms and legs to the shifting patterns of light.

It's easy to guess even from the outward appearance of these women and their assorted children that they're not staying at any of the guesthouses in this resort town, and certainly not at the refurbished holiday camp further along the front. They don't look wealthy (the kids' clothes are hand-me-down, the purses are worn, and the women frown into them), but they look, if it still means anything, bohemian. Rachel's curving calves and strong bare arms are defiantly untanned; her luxuriant, nearly black hair is pinned up untidily on her head. Janie, who went to art college, wears a short gauzy green dress with seventies-style pink paisley patterns. Her hair, which is light brown and dead straight, is cut in some style that Rachel at once deplores and admires: ragged uneven lengths, as if it had been chopped off at random. They are in their early thirties, both at that piquant moment of physical change when the outward accidents of flesh are beginning to be sharpened from inside by character and experience.

They have come to town just for the day. Rachel and her husband, Sam, have a cottage inland, where they spend their holidays; Janie and her partner, Vince, are visiting. Rachel and Janie have been best friends since school. They did their degrees together in Brighton and shared a house. When Rachel moved back to Bristol, where they grew up (Sam was working for the BBC there), Janie went to look for work in London and stayed. They're not obviously alike: Rachel is impulsive and can sound bossy and loudly middle class; Janie's more wary and ironic. But they tell each other everything, almost everything. During the long months between visits, they talk for hours on the phone. Both of them have other friends, but it's not the same: there's no one else to whom they can unfold their inner lives with the same freedom.

The two have been talking intensely today, ever since they woke up. First, Rachel came into Janie's bedroom and sat on the bed in her pajamas while Janie fed Lulu, and then they talked as they clambered on all fours to tidy the children's mattresses, laid out end to end in the attic. Hours ago, they got the children dressed and drove into town; this was supposedly to do some shopping and get the kids out of the house so that Sam could get on with his writing, but all along they had in mind exactly the treat they are enjoying now—this lazy, delicious, stolen afternoon doing nothing, escaped from the men, talking on and on about them. They dip into their purses extravagantly, and the children sense the possibility of largesse. The older boys race off to the toy shop to buy guns for themselves, windmills for the little ones.

In order to earn this day in the sunshine with their beautiful children running around them, how many toiling domesticated days haven't these young mothers put in? Both of them do a token amount of work outside the home—Janie does a few hours of art therapy with special-needs children, Rachel does a bit of copy editing—but truly for years they have been, half involuntarily, absorbed into the warm vegetable soup of motherhood, which surprisingly resembles their own mothers' lives, thirty years ago. They don't know quite how this happened; before the children were born, their relationships had shown every sign of being modern ones, built around the equal importance of two careers and the sharing of housework.

Neither is exactly unhappy, but what has built up in them instead is a sense of surplus, of life unlived. Somewhere else, while they are absorbed in pushchairs and fish fingers and wiping bottoms, there must be another world, of intense experiences for grownups. They feel as if, through their perpetual preoccupation with infantile things, they, too, had become infants; as if their adult selves were ripening and sweetening all in vain, wasted. You can see this sensual surplus

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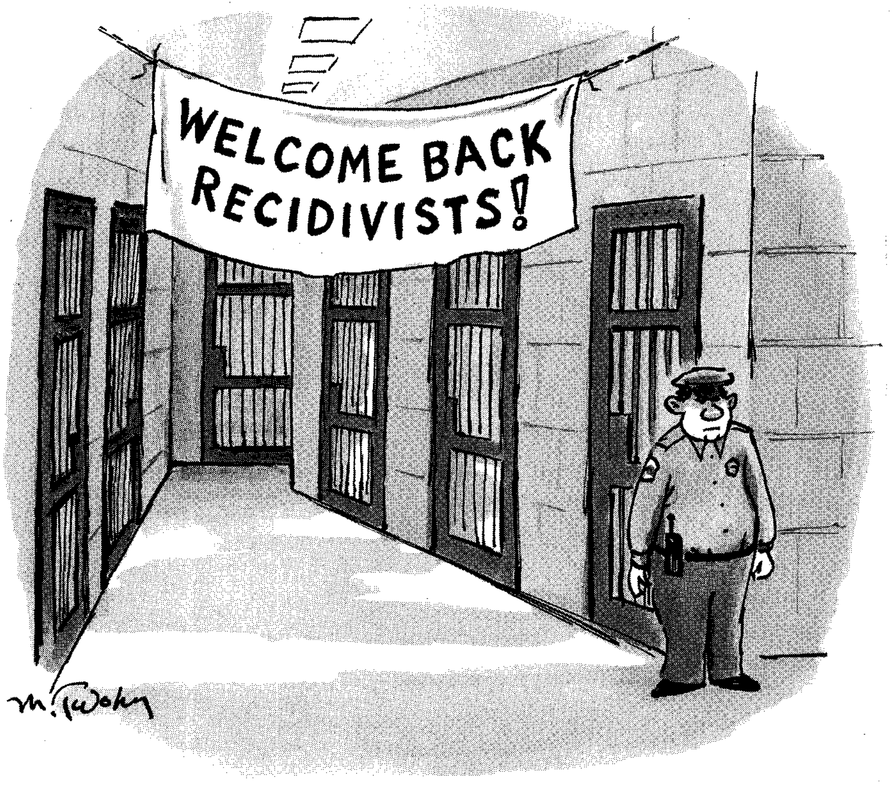
WELCOME BACK RECIDIVISTS!

• •

in them. It glistens on their skin and in their eyes, like cream rising to the top of the milk (though neither of them is fat: Rachel is tall and muscular, Janie slight and boyish, only her breasts rounded because she's breast-feeding). They half know this about themselves, how visibly they exude their sexual readiness. They know that they make a picture, spread out there under the trees in their summer dresses, with their brood gambolling around them.

The children press home their opportunity and clamor for ice cream.

“Pretty please, Mummy, pretty please.”

“It'll keep us happy for much longer—you won't have to worry about us.”

The guns the boys have bought were made in Germany, and, on the packages, inside the bright-orange explosion where it says “Bang Bang” in English it also says “Toller Knall,” which is presumably the German equivalent. The children point the guns at one another's heads, shouting, “Toller Knall, Toller Knall,” then laugh delightedly at how unthreatening it sounds.

“You know I can't bear that,” Rachel says. “I have a thing about guns pointing at heads.”

“Mum, they're only plastic toys,” Joshua explains patiently. “It would probably be more dangerous to poke him with my finger.”

But the boys give way cheerfully and aim at imaginary rabbits in the grass instead, squinting along their sights.

“Sam actually encourages it,” Rachel says sotto voce to Janie. “He wants to take Joshua to join a gun club. He came out with all this stuff about teaching him respect for weapons.”

“But didn't he used to fulminate against the arms trade?”

“Oh, probably at some point. But for me it's not his principles that are the problem: have you ever seen him trying to put up shelves? It's not Joshua I'm worried for. Sam shouldn't be allowed anywhere near a gun.”

Melia, Janie's middle child (much more difficult than the charming boys), pretends to get upset about the rabbits and ends up bursting into real tears. Rachel sometimes wonders whether Melia wouldn't respond better to a little less understanding, but she preserves a diplomatic silence while Janie comforts and negotiates. Rachel thinks that she has taken more naturally to motherhood than Janie has; Janie is dreamier and misses her solitude painfully.

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"Maybe ice cream would be a good idea," Janie decides.

The children plant their colored plastic windmills in the grass and run to queue at the yellow-and-white painted café. Rachel is telling Janie about a man, Kieran, a friend of Sam's in London, whom she thinks she might have some sort of a thing going with. Janie knows Kieran, too, though not well.

"It's really nothing, it's probably nothing," Rachel says. "You'll think I'm making it all up. Only it's funny that he turned up one evening last month, while he was back in Bristol visiting his parents. I'm sure he knew that Sam was going to be out. I had Sukey and Dom in the bath, I had my sleeves rolled up, I was in my foulest old clothes, my hair was just pulled into this elastic band, I'm sure I hadn't brushed it since I got up in the morning."

"Maybe he goes for that," Janie says. "You know how some men have this idea of domesticated women that really turns them on—only the ones who aren't living with them, needless to say."

"Joshua answered the doorbell or I wouldn't have even bothered. And then I thought he'd just leave because Sam wasn't there, but he came into the bathroom and he helped me out with the kids and actually it was really nice—we just got on so well. He cleaned the bath out afterward while I was reading to them; I didn't even realize that till later. Sam would never, ever, think of cleaning out the bath unless I asked him to. I always thought Kieran was such a serious sort of intellectual—you know, only interested in talking about Habermas or Adorno or something. But we were joking away, and then he was telling me about his sister's children. Dom was splashing us with his plastic ducks, we were completely soaked, and I was so apologetic, only Kieran said he loved it. 'I love it,' he said. And then I thought afterward, What was he trying to say? What exactly did he love? Only perhaps I'm taking it the wrong way."

Janie thinks that Rachel is dangerously susceptible to men; she thinks that her own skeptical suspicion of them makes her much shrewder in her assessments of their motivations and characters. Also, she doesn't know how Rachel can put up with Sam's moods. She has her own problems with Vince, but she would never allow anyone to domineer over her life the way Sam does over Rachel's, with his black looks and his silences and his stormings.

"I almost dialled Kieran's number the other night," Rachel says. "The week before we came to the cottage. I did dial it, but I put the phone down before it even rang. I pretended to myself that calling him was just a natural friendly thing to do. I was only going to complain to him—you know, make a funny story out of the sort of day I'd had. Perhaps I should have. And I was going to say that he should come and spend a few days with us in the country."

Janie is solicitous. She is feeding Lulu, the shadows of the tree's leaves flickering over her bared breast and the baby's head moving with its rhythmic sucking. "Don't get hurt," she says.

Rachel throws herself restlessly down on her back on the grass. "I should be so lucky," she says. "As if."

"I'd wait," Janie says, "for him to contact you."

Later in the afternoon, Rachel takes the children for a round on the putting green. They are hopelessly slow because there are so many of them and the little ones take so many shots to get the ball in the hole, even when Joshua and Tom cheat gallantly on their behalf. Melia throws down her iron, sulks, traipses after them, joins in again. By the time they are halfway around the green several groups of players are backed up behind them and Rachel takes a break to let the others past. She runs over to where Janie is watching from beside the pushchair. She has had an idea. When they've finished on the green, why don't they buy sausages and chips at the café so they don't have to cook tonight? This liberation seems of a piece with the lovely day. The drudgery ahead—peeling potatoes, frying, feeding, washing up—lifts from the evening as lightly as a floating cloud. Why not? Life might be easy after all. Rachel phones Sam and Vince on her mobile to tell them to cook themselves something; she has to walk off a little distance between the trees before she can get a decent signal.

When Rachel switches off the mobile and turns around, Janie thinks for a moment that Sam must have said some-

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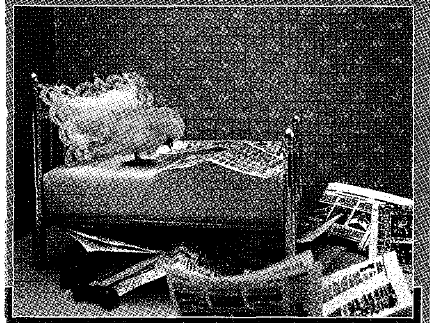

Yes, yes! Elvira did like piña coladas and taking walks in the rain.

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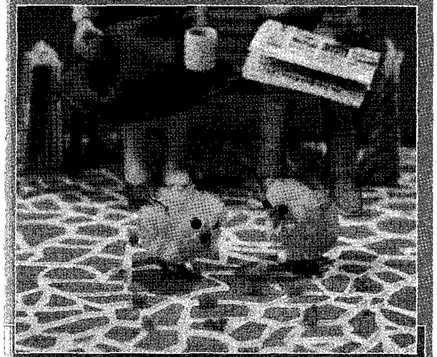

"Enough with the bread crumbs already. Who's still eating carbs?"

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thing vile. Rachel's face is concentrated with surprise; she walks back across the grass as if she were looking carefully where to put her bare feet.

"You'll never guess," she says.

"What?"

"Kieran's turned up."

"Oh, Rach."

"But I really never did phone him. I never asked him. He's been before, a couple of times. Apparently, he just turned up this afternoon. He knew we'd be at the cottage because Sam mentioned it. Sam's going to make them something with pasta."

"Are you glad?"

"It feels like a sign: that this thing I've imagined must be real, it must be something."

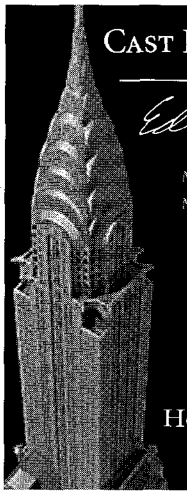
"I suppose so."

"I truly thought I might just be making it up. But you said to wait for him to contact me and he has. Sort of. It feels serious."

In all the agitations of the putting, Rachel's hair has come partly out of its pins; long strands coil on her neck. She's statuesque, with waxy creamy skin, like a Reynolds portrait; she doesn't have the physical lightness or fluidity that suggests affairs, easy transitions between men, concealments. The boys are shouting from the green; it's time for them to take their turn again. She picks up her putting iron thoughtfully. Janie can feel excitement radiating out from her like heat.

Kieran's arrival could have been awkward for the men back at the cottage, because Kieran and Sam have been friends for years, since they were at Cambridge, whereas Sam knows Vince only because of Janie and thinks of him as a bit of a lightweight. All morning, while Sam was at work on the computer, he was uneasily suppressing an awareness of Vince at loose ends downstairs, strolling around the rooms, reading yesterday's paper, getting himself something to eat. Sam was irritated that the girls hadn't taken Vince with them when they went to town; and then that they were staying out so long.

However, Kieran has brought with him a big polythene packet of weed, which, as they set about rolling it up and smoking it, produces an immediate cheerful camaraderie. They sprawl in the



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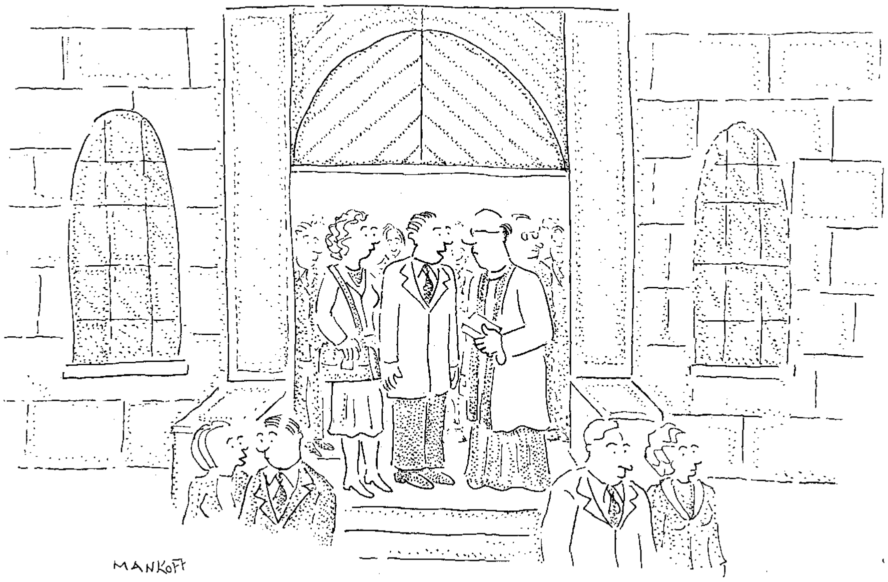
plastic garden chairs in the sunshine, smoking and drinking cup after cup of tea. Sam is so relieved that he doesn't have to make conversation with Vince all by himself that he becomes expansively friendly toward him. He always forgets what it is that Vince does for a living (usually he covers this up by talking about the contemporary novel: he published one himself three years ago and is supposed to be working on the next); tactfully now, he leads the conversation around to the kind of crossover electronic music he remembers Vince likes, and Vince tells them that he designed the lighting for a recent concert in the Queen Elizabeth Hall. Vince is eager to please. He is lean, with the wedge-narrow face of a well-bred collie, and his hair is cut to flop into his eyes like bleached-pale silk. He has the kind of good looks that men don't mind imagining that women like. Sam doesn't hold it against Vince that he himself is bulky-shouldered and putting on weight. His brown curls are thinning on top and he wears little gold-rimmed glasses; he fancies he looks a little like middle-period Coleridge.

The peace of the afternoon seems deeper because of all the children's toys lying where they were dropped, the bikes beached on their sides, the swing hanging still. The cottage is tucked into the bottom of a crease worked deep between the rounded slopes of the hills; sheep are grazing in the field that rises so steeply behind the cottage you can almost touch the roof from the path that winds along its lower edge. In the wide bowlful of tender light the buzzards sail superbly, mewing and turning their pale undersides to the declining sun. Wrens are pecking the greenfly from Rachel's sweet-pea plants.

Kieran is telling the others about his grandfather who worked as a salesman for a company selling private telephone systems, mostly to the collieries; he did business in the West Country coalfield that's not far from the cottage, worked out and half forgotten now. The telephones they used down the mines were made of cast iron, his grandfather had told him; they weighed a hundredweight each. Kieran is shorter than the other two; he has a big distinctive head with deep-hooded eyes, whose glance mostly idles downward, and several days' growth of strong black beard. His body is indefinite, shapeless because it's wrapped as always in dark loose clothes, more layers than are necessary in this weather.

"He worked in North Wales, too," Kieran says, "putting in systems for the slate mines. Do you know that when the slate miners were dying of silicosis, average life expectancy thirty-five to forty, the local doctors wrote a paper blaming it on the stewed tea they drank?"

Kieran always knows things; he trusts facts more than opinions. He talks with his usual concentration and exactitude, but something arouses in Sam the solicitude for his welfare that has been an element of their relationship from the



*"Good sermon, Reverend, but all that God stuff was pretty far-fetched."*

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beginning. Kieran's face is puffy and a nerve is jumping beside his right eye; he hunches over the rolling papers in a tension of fatigue that makes Sam worry that the job in cardiology at Barts is disillusioning, and that Kieran is beginning to brood over this second career, which was supposed to save his life from academic futility. He isn't telling his stories anymore, about medical dilemmas or patients presenting extraordinary symptoms. In these stories, his work in medicine seemed to open up a whole world of meaning.

Rachel telephones the cottage to tell Sam that she and Janie are going to buy a meal for the kids in town. He's relieved that she doesn't seem to mind Kieran's turning up. After another cup of tea and a toke, Sam goes into the kitchen and opens the door of the fridge and stands frowning perplexedly at what's inside, then begins with an air of bemusement, as if he'd never done it before, to make the tomato sauce he's actually been able to cook for at least fifteen years. He rattles around in the kitchen drawers hunting for the wooden spoons and the garlic press. Kieran in the garden opens a bottle of wine he brought. Vince turns out to know something about wine. Kieran doesn't; he just drinks it. He's the same with food: he eats only to fuel his system.

Vince was uncomfortable at first, alone with these two men who are a few years older than him and whose displays of cleverness he finds both irritating and intimidating. He reads, but he hasn't read any of the books they've read. (He knows that they studied literature, but as far as he can see they talk mostly about philosophy.) This morning, when Janie went out with Rachel and all the kids and Sam was writing upstairs, Vince wondered what point there was in his being here (wasn't the whole idea of the holiday that he was supposed to spend more time with the kids?), and he even contemplated driving back to London and coming down to pick them up at the weekend. He was just wasting days that he could be putting in at the studio. After a few smokes, though, his sociable nature has reasserted itself and he is enjoying himself. He's looking forward to the kids coming back, too; he really does want to spend more time with them.

When Sam goes into the kitchen to cook, Vince finds himself telling Kieran in great detail about the logistics of the lighting setup he's arranging for a show at the Albany. He is gratified by Kieran's questioning. He tells him about the concern in the industry over the decline in the quality of sound recording in television and documentary work, now that there are lightweight video cameras and no one bothers to employ the old sound guys anymore. The BECTU newsletter is full of laments for past standards. Kieran makes a much better listener than Sam, Vince thinks. Sam always wants to take over the conversation. Vince has tried to read Sam's novel but can't get past the second chapter. None of the characters ever have a thought that doesn't lead into dense thickets of historical and cultural association. There is no room left over for anything actually to happen.

When Janie and Rachel come through the gate into the garden, Kieran stands up at once from where the men (stoned, by the looks of it) are sprawled on garden chairs. There are plates on the table and a saucepan lying nearby on the grass. Both women see quite clearly that the moment they come into view, with their arms full of children and shopping, Kieran is looking for Rachel, and that on his face when he sees her there is a moment's naked flash of feeling: of relief, perhaps, or desperation. He hurries forward to help them. In reaction to this glimpse of emotion, Rachel becomes queenly and remote, retreating into her role as homemaker, unpacking the shopping into the kitchen cupboards and the fridge, running hot water for the dirty pasta plates.

Soon after their return home, Sukey begins to droop. This isn't usual: she is a cheerful little girl with stout strong arms and legs and a mop of straw-textured fair hair. Now she whines and clings to Rachel and says that her head hurts. Her face is flushed and hot, and as soon as Rachel gets her settled on the sofa with her doggie and her blanket she throws up over everything.

"Too much sun. My fault," Rachel says, on her hands and knees with a cloth and a bucket of disinfectant and water. Sukey lies languidly across Sam's lap,

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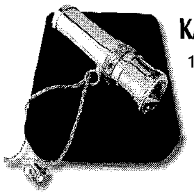

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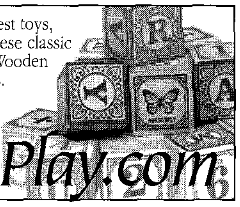

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wrapped in a sheet and hanging onto a plastic bowl. "I should have insisted she wear her hat. I should have made them stay in the shade more."

"We needn't go to the pub," Sam says. "If you think we oughtn't."

There has been a plan for all the adults to go to the pub, which is ten minutes' walk down the road into the village, leaving Joshua and Tom in charge. (In case of emergency, the boys could telephone the pub; the landlord is a friend and wouldn't mind.)

"The rest of you go," Rachel says. "I'm sure there's nothing to worry about. But I'm feeling quite tired. I fancy an early night. And I probably should just keep an eye on her."

Kieran drops on his haunches till he's at Sukey's level, he speaks to her gravely, sweetly; she yields herself, allows him to feel her forehead, pull back her eyelids and look into her pupils, take her pulse. His fingers, with their bitten yellow nails and curling black hairs, are dark and coarsely male against her pearl-pink skin. Rachel's eyes are fixed on Kieran's face, calmly enough.

He says to Sukey, "Mummy knows exactly what the matter is. I would trust her. Mummies usually know best. I don't think there's anything to worry about here."

And he smiles into Rachel's expectant open gaze.

Kieran doesn't smile very often. When he does, his face becomes quite jolly and ordinary. It's like a reprieve, as if a daunting problem had unexpectedly turned out to be easy.

"Why don't you see how she is in half an hour?" he says. "If she goes off to sleep peacefully enough I don't see any reason why you shouldn't leave her. It would probably be good for you to get a break."

"Maybe," Rachel murmurs gratefully.

Sam thinks that if Kieran can get this out of being a doctor—this exchange of authority and submissive trust—then perhaps everything will be all right for him after all.

Upstairs, fifteen minutes later, Janie and Rachel are giving Dom and Melia a bath.

"Rach, why don't you go to the pub? I really don't mind staying in. Anyway, I'm worried in case Lulu doesn't sleep through. I can call you if Sukey's sick again."

"No, honestly. I'd rather not."

"I just thought, you know, if Kieran's only here for tonight."

Rachel hides her involuntary smile in Dom's frog-flannel. "There is something, isn't there?" she whispers.

"God, *yes*," Janie whispers back. "The way he looked at you when we came in."

"I know."

"Then go to the pub."

"No. I don't think so. I'm not ready. I'm not ready for it yet."

Sukey doesn't throw up again; her temperature comes down. Rachel reads to her and then sits beside her bed until she is soundly asleep. All the other children are asleep, too, by this time, except Joshua and Tom, who are watching a video in the front room. Rachel goes downstairs and out into the garden. The light is draining imperceptibly out of the sky; the velvety plum color of the copper beech is drinking up darkness. Yellow light from inside the house glitters on the stone flags of the patio. Through the French windows, the TV flickers behind the silhouetted heads of the boys intently watching.

Vince comes back from the pub for his fags. He stops to smoke one in the garden. She has one, too, although she doesn't usually, and they experience a rush of mutual friendliness. Vince thinks Rachel's a sweet woman, not his type but warm and nurturing. Rachel feels sorry for Vince—she thinks Janie gives him a hard time. He tells her that he's really enjoying himself (he's forgotten how he felt in the morning). He says that this place means a lot to him, that he and Janie really ought to try to move out of London. It isn't fair bringing kids up there; they need wide open spaces and contact with nature. Rachel listens to him indulgently, knowing that nothing will come of it, and that Vince would fade away with boredom in the country.

When he's gone, a clamor of rooks passes overhead. It's darker now. Moths come visiting Rachel's chive flowers and nicotiana in a pale blur of movement. A bat stirs the air with a beat of its leathery wings. There's a moment's impulse when she thinks she'll tell the boys that

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she's going to the pub after all, and that they have to listen for the babies. But she doesn't move, she stays planted there in the still air darting with invisible movement, washed in streams of incense from the balsam poplar.

On the way home from the pub, Janie and Kieran fall behind the others because she stops to listen when he says that he can hear an owl hunting. She is genuinely delighted when she hears it, too. These two haven't spoken together much during the evening. Sam and Kieran were arguing about Iraq (it's typical of Kieran that he supports the war, when no one else does). She and Vince were having one of their talks, about how he's got to start being home more, to make space for her to get on with her own art work. (Vince didn't point out tonight, not in so many words, that his work brings in money and hers doesn't.) Janie has never quite trusted Kieran; she's always thought that he was one of Sam's Cambridge types, too absorbed in himself, preoccupied with the game of jockeying for intellectual position. She wonders what he's up to with Rachel.

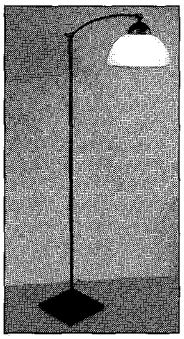
The stretch of road outside the pub is lit, but when they turn off to climb the hill to the cottage they are plunged into a darkness deep and complete and astonishing to these city folk, who are used to the perpetual urban orange seepage of light. They didn't think to bring a torch. Walking into that darkness, solid and prohibitive, feels as counterintuitive as walking into a wall.

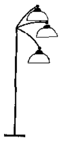
Janie falters. "I've no idea where I'm going," she says.

"Hold on to me," Kieran says, reaching out. "Though I've absolutely no idea, either."

"I suppose at least if we fall into anything we'll go together."

They can't see each other; she feels his hand come searching, and she clasps his upper arm, when she finds it, with both her hands. She remembers what he's wearing—a green shirt patterned with yellow motifs in some kind of slippery material—as if it were suddenly significant, although she's been looking at it without interest (if anything, with distaste) all evening. The slippery fabric slides under her fingers. His hand blunders against her bare arm under the car-





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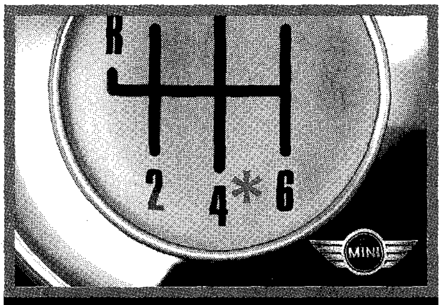

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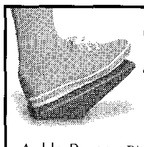

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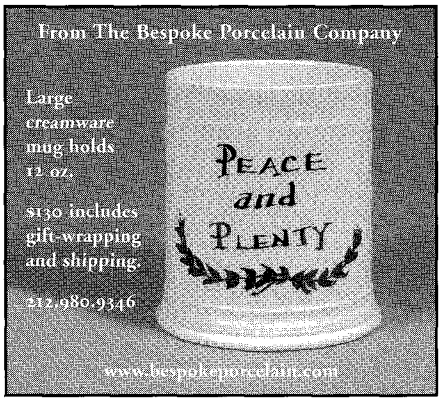
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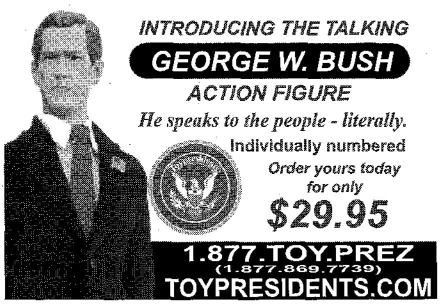
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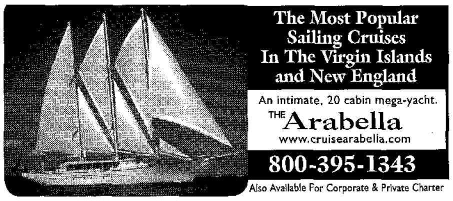
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digan she has slung across her shoulders.

They can hear the others' voices some way ahead. "O.K., Janie?" Vince calls.

"Fine!"

"Bloody dark!" Kieran shouts. "Bloody countryside!"

"Navigate by the bloody stars!" Sam shouts back.

Kieran and Janie have both drunk enough to be unsteady, hanging onto each other in the middle of the road without any visual clues to help them. They stagger and he grabs her and pulls her against him and then begins to kiss her face with a beery smoky garlicky mouth (the garlic was in the pasta, which she and Rachel didn't eat). He lands kisses randomly at first, on her ear, on the side of her nose. After a moment's surprise, she kisses him back, putting her hand up into his hair and finding his mouth with hers. It's a long time since she's properly kissed anyone but Vince; she's pleased that she seems to manage it suavely and skillfully. Then her head swims and they lose their balance and almost fall. He sets his feet apart on the road so he can support her; he puts an arm around behind her shoulders.

"Who are you?" he says softly, so close she can taste his breath on her. "It's so dark it could be anyone."

She can smell the salty sourness of his hair, too, as if he didn't bother with shampoo. "I've no idea," she says. "Who are you? What just happened?"

"Don't stop it. Don't stop, please."

His voice is urgent, pleading. He means it.

Janie thinks that this is what he meant, when he looked at Rachel in the afternoon: he was just desperate to lose himself like this. She will do just as well, for his need, as Rachel; and yet that's not insulting but exhilarating. She feels the same way: he will do for her, just as well. She doesn't stop. She starts again.

His mouth is hot and liquid. His lips feel swollen and thin-skinned; his beard growth is long enough to be sleek and not stubble-rough against her mouth and her wet cheek. She thinks of the many parties at Sam and Rachel's where she has stayed dumb while Kieran has spoken out eloquently on some subject; and now that same tongue of his is shyly tentative against hers, and hers is bolder. It's marvellously simplifying that there's no time for this to become anything more than a kiss. They have only this moment before they have to follow the others and go back inside the light.

Vince calls again. His voice sounds a long way off.

"We're listening to the owl," Kieran shouts back.

It makes a space between them. They draw slightly apart.

"Look what you've done," Janie says.

She couldn't have said this to his face, in the light.

"What have I done?"

She finds his hand, presses it against her breasts, where they have leaked soaked circles of milk onto her dress. "I'm still feeding. I'm very full. Ready for the baby when I get home. You made it come."

"I didn't know that happened," he says, not embarrassed, in a voice of calm scientific interest.

When he says that, Janie intuits a warning; faintly, like a note sounding far off in the hills. She has an instant's intimation of how she could, in a different life from the one she has had so far, come to need this terribly and not be able to get it: this calm impersonal interest of his, turned on her.

But for the time being it is Kieran who is desperate.

Rachel thinks that she's going to lie awake, absorbed in the momentousness of her life today. She's thinking that she's not going to go through with this thing with Kieran, not now, not this time. But that doesn't spoil the euphoria that comes from knowing that he wants her, knowing that he has pursued her down here. It makes her feel as if there were a glorious abundant tide of secret possibility flowing around the world, enough for everyone. She feels that she will be able now to dip into this tide and take her share anytime she chooses to.

Sam is lying flat, snoring with his mouth open, because he's been drinking and smoking. She shoves him hard to tell him to turn over, and then when she cuddles up against his broad hot back she falls asleep almost at once.

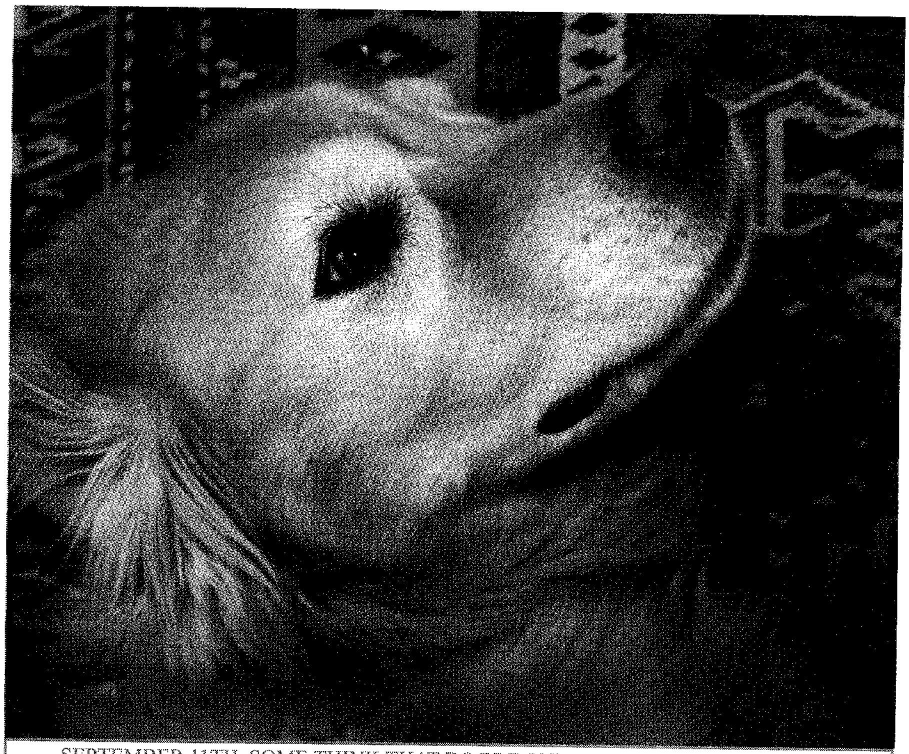
Janie has brought Lulu into bed to feed her; Vince is reading a computer magazine. Her treachery in relation to him doesn't seem important yet. (Vaguely, she thinks he owes her this.) If she imagines Rachel finding out what she's just done with Kieran, after everything they talked about all afternoon, she feels a sickish kind of unease. She doesn't for one moment, though, believe that she ought to have deflected Kieran's kiss, which opened this thrilling new space in the night. A real adventure with a man mustn't be wasted. Everything is running away so fast; your deepest responsibility is to snatch at all the living you can.

And, anyway, she only kissed him.

Kieran asked if he could call her and she said she didn't know yet, but as the baby sucks she feels herself hollowed out from her old life, empty and hungry, filled up with an excited wanting as painful and bloating as wind.

Rachel has made up the sofa bed with sheets and a duvet for Kieran. She kept worriedly sniffing it and saying that if it smelled of vomit then he could have their bed and she and Sam would be quite happy down here. He hadn't been able to smell anything then but now he can. He lies awake wondering how families manage in this awful perpetual twilight of false sleep: the landing lights left on, the rustlings and the snatches of childish sleep talk, the bare feet padding downstairs, the murmured parental admonishments, the baby's loud cry at some point, Sam's snoring, the toilet light left on after a child's visit so that the fan keeps whirring until he goes upstairs himself to switch it off. He hears one of them climb into bed with Sam and Rachel. He hears the bed creak and protest as the adults move over.

He remembers glancing into Sam and Rachel's bedroom on his way to the toilet this afternoon when he arrived. The king-size bed, its grubby Habitat striped sheets and heaped-up duvet littered with clothes and toys and Rachel's hairbrush and face cream, looked to him then like the outward embodiment of something he wanted, something he had missed out on. In the thin hours before dawn, the truth seems bleaker. He isn't a good sleeper at the best of times. The duvet is too hot and then when he pushes it off he is too cold. He finds himself longing for the perfect silence of his own room, which he thought was what he wanted to escape from, coming down here. ♦



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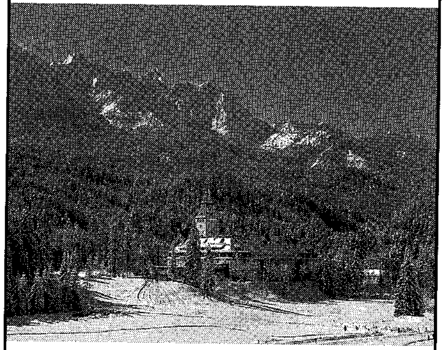

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# THE CRITICS

### THE THEATRE

# SHOW AND TELL

*Seducing the citizens and the señoritas.*

### BY JOHN LAHR

Dakin Matthews's adaptation of "Henry IV" (at Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont Theatre, under the direction of Jack O'Brien) stuffs Shakespeare's two-part chronicle of the wayward Prince Hal's succession to his troubled father's throne into one almost four-hour evening—a hero sandwich of sorts. It's fast food for thought, but tasty nonetheless. As a study of public and private rebellion, "Henry IV" is as savvy today as it was when the first part was minted, in the winter of 1596. It is fascinating now, as it must have been then, to watch the forces of politics and play contend with each other. Henry IV (the expert Richard Easton) has usurped the throne of Richard II—a grab for power that preys both on his mind and on the legitimacy of his sovereignty. (The story is retold no fewer than four times in "Henry IV, Part I.") Set in an era when the notion of the divine right of kings is losing its sway in the land, the play meditates on the development of a new kind of divinity—the pageant of self that we call glamour—to legitimatize authority and win the people's allegiance. In this stage-managed show of command (a precursor to public relations), dissimulation, it becomes clear, is a critical factor. Hotspur (the excellent Ethan Hawke) is a case in point: he may, as his name implies, be both brave and bright, but his inability to control or hide his feelings detracts from his credibility and ultimately jeopardizes his survival.

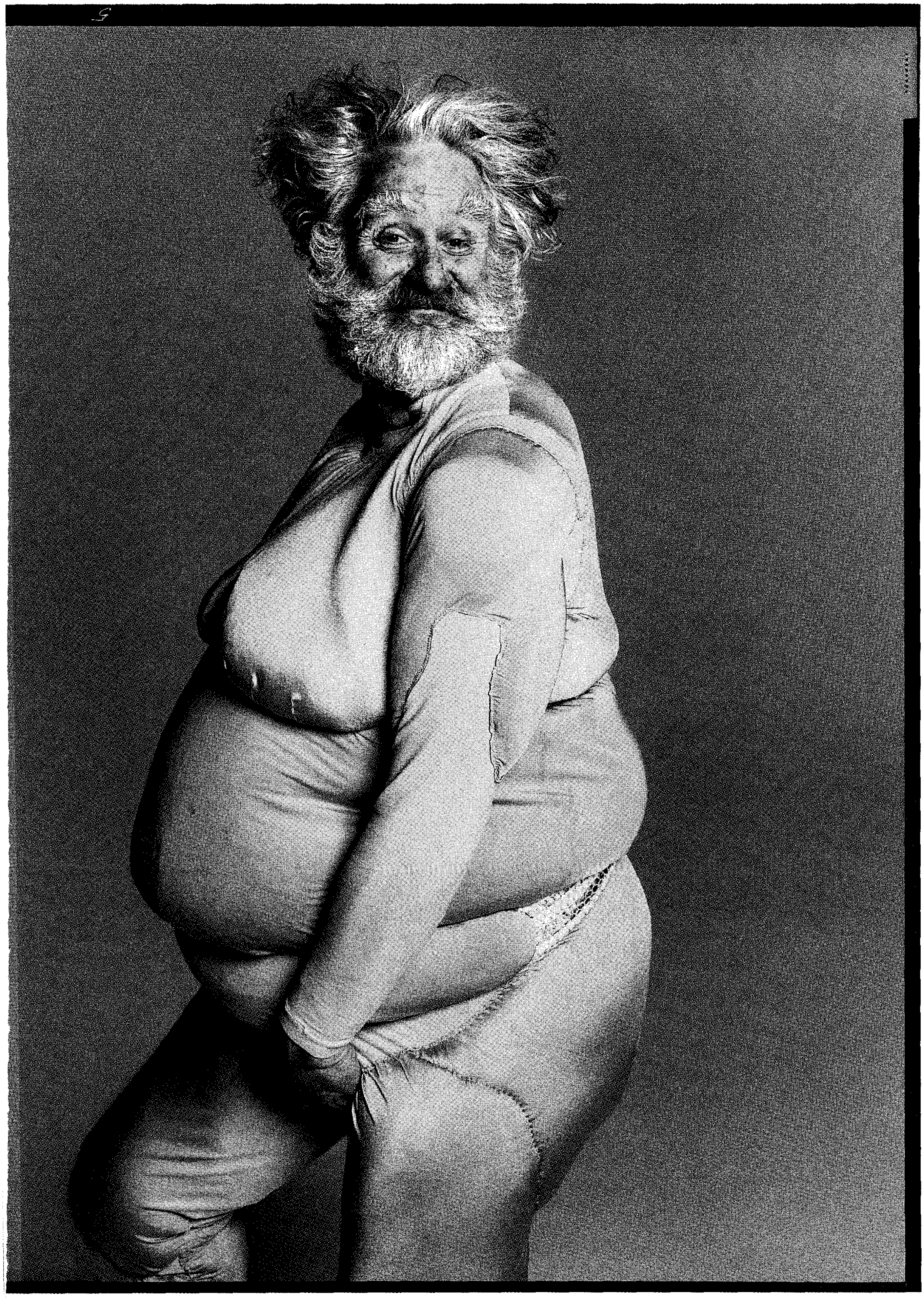
Leadership, as Shakespeare understood from Queen Elizabeth I's reign, is all about perception, and the King stresses the point to his legendarily feckless son Hal (Michael Hayden). "The hope and expectation of thy time / Is ruined, and the soul of every man / Prophetically do forethink thy fall," the King scolds. "For thou hast lost thy princely privilege / With vile participation. Not an eye / But is a-weary of thy common sight." The King counsels the importance of keeping a low profile and uses his own rise as an example. "By being seldom seen / . . . I was wondered at / . . . And dressed myself in such humility / That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts." When Hal becomes Henry V and wages war against France, the strategy is, at least in part, an exercise in image-building, prompted by his father's dying words: "Be it thy course to busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels, that action hence borne out / May waste the memory of former days."

But the lesson of making a proper spectacle of yourself, as the audience knows, is one that Prince Hal has already learned. (Typically, Dad is the last to know.) The first time we see him—just before he plays a terrific practical joke on Falstaff (Kevin Kline) by robbing the blackguard of his stolen booty—he is already exhibiting an actor's ability to observe his own performance. He is planning his public transformation and gauging its impact: "So when this loose behavior I throw off, / And pay the debt I never promised, / By how much better than my word I am, / . . . My reformation, glittering o'er my fault, / Shall show more goodly, and attract more eyes / Than that which hath no foil to set it off." Here we have the first glimpse of the killer and the king-to-be, whom William Hazlitt called "a very amiable monster." In O'Brien's production, the importance of Hal's speech is signalled by a spotlight that freezes the world around it. But Michael Hayden, although he speaks the words well enough, fails to parse their meaning, and the moment dribbles away. In general, Hayden, who replaced Billy Crudup in the production's all-star lineup a month before performances began, conveys no real sense of Hal, either as the rebel or as the charmer. He brings to his character's louche liveliness little psychological edginess or physical ease or patrician sang-froid. As a result, the production, which is intellectually stimulating, is emotionally lopsided.

The play anchors its argument about political style in an unforgettable example of the reverse, that impolitic whirlwind of impulsiveness Sir John Falstaff. Lord of misrule, enemy of boundaries and blandness, the quintessence of appetite, Falstaff is always sensationally, unapologetically himself. Shakespeare, who depicts the politicians hiding their cravenness in a show of good manners, uses Falstaff to make the opposite point. A liar, a cheat, a coward, a thief, Falstaff often speaks the truth. Perhaps the greatest of all comic stage creations, he fulfills the role of the clown by calling society and all its received opinions into question. "What is honour?" he asks. "A word. What is in that word honour? What is that honour? Air. A trim reck-

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD AVEDON

*Kevin Kline as the impulsive, impolitic Falstaff in Lincoln Center's "Henry IV."*



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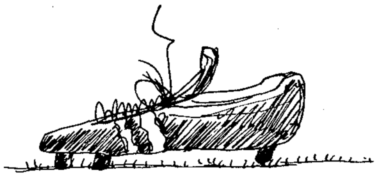
oning! Who hath it? He that died a' Wednesday." Falstaff, who refers to his body as "this little kingdom," is, in microcosm, a chaotic example of bad government and a monument to waste.

As the "huge hill of flesh," Kevin Kline, one of our finest Shakespearean actors, goes easy on the character's Dionysian folderol and plays up the Apollonian sinew of his fine mind instead. As a result, what we get from this Falstaff is the irony of his well-spoken words, not the infectiousness of his high spirits. "I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men," Falstaff says. And he's right. To be Falstaff's equal, as Hal is meant to be, one has to box clever; although Hal emerges from Falstaff's underworld with a sense of life and of the common man, his greatest political gain is the flexibility that he has acquired as sidekick to the playful Falstaff. Unlike his grave father or his rigid, humorless brother Prince John (Lorenzo Pisoni), Hal knows how to improvise, how to stay alert to the world around him, and—as we see in his manipulation of soldiers and ambassadors in "Henry V"—how to be what others need him to be.

Once Hal becomes king, however, he must rid himself of Falstaff, whose presence would smudge the image of the new ruler's heroic redemption. All Hal's former companions "are banished till their conversations / Appear more wise and modest to the world," Prince John says, in the play's penultimate speech, which was cut from this production. In other words, it's a matter of damage control. Falstaff's ouster amounts to an execution. "Banish plump Jack, and banish all the world," Falstaff once joked. But, to inherit the world and to rule it, Hal must purge his life of the liberty and the unself-conscious ease that the old rascal stood for. The production ends with a kind of brooding, poignant standoff. Falstaff swaggers in the foreground while the King, upstage, kneels in prayer: two solitary spellbinders trapped in a perpetual performance of the spells they've cast—one of pleasure, the other of power.

"Henry IV: Part I" opens in a climate infected by rumors of Hal's "riot and dishonour." In the prologue to "Part II," those rumors materialize in a character called Rumour, who says, of wagging tongues, "They bring smooth comforts false, worse than true wrongs." "Anna in the Tropics" (at the Royale) is one such false comfort. The play, which arrived trailing clouds of glory, was awarded this year's Pulitzer Prize by a panel that had read the script but hadn't seen it staged, which is as absurd as giving a restaurant four stars on the basis of its menu. Nilo Cruz's simple, lyrical anecdote—about a Tampa, Florida, cigar factory in 1929, where a handsome "lector" reads "Anna Karenina" to the workers as they roll coronas, thus inspiring in them a new desire for literature, for life, and for him—is really a libretto for a musical, not a satisfying vehicle for the stage. Full of predictable melodramatic flourishes but no psychology, in any meaningful sense of the word, the desires and despairs of Cruz's charming but thinly drawn characters cry out for song, not speech.

The delicacy of the play's romantic comedy also calls for a kind of directorial lightness of touch that Emily Mann can't deliver; the novelty of Cruz's subject matter is forever rubbing up against the banality of its presentation. At the opening, for instance, three factory *cigarreras* stand gabbling at the P. & O. pier (shouting seems to be the preferred vocal option in this show), as they wait for the boat carrying the new lector, Juan Julian (Jimmy Smits), to arrive. When he finally appears—in full tropical-suited suaviosity—he backs onto the stage as if the dock were a scrum of people, when in fact only three bodies inhabit the vast proscenium space. This entrance manages an unusual hat trick: it is simultaneously corny, unrealistic, and laughable. Later in the play, the macho, modernizing force of the factory, a saturnine lout named Cheché (David Zayas), sets forth his plan to have machines, not people, roll the cigars—which would put paid both to the reading and to Juan Julian's romantic influence. The workers propose doing it "the American way": they want everyone to vote on whether the lector should stay. "And what's the American way if everybody said no?" the owner of the factory asks. To that question, the man sitting next to me whispered to his companion, "Do it anyway." ♦



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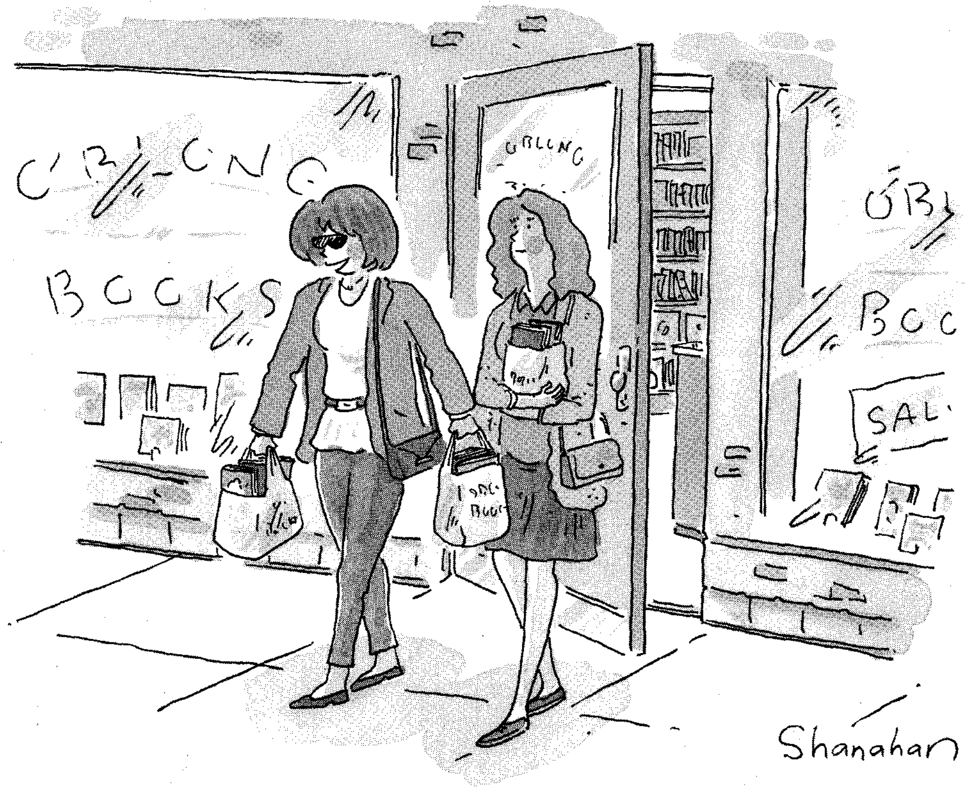

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## Something for everyone. Literally.

A CRITIC AT LARGE

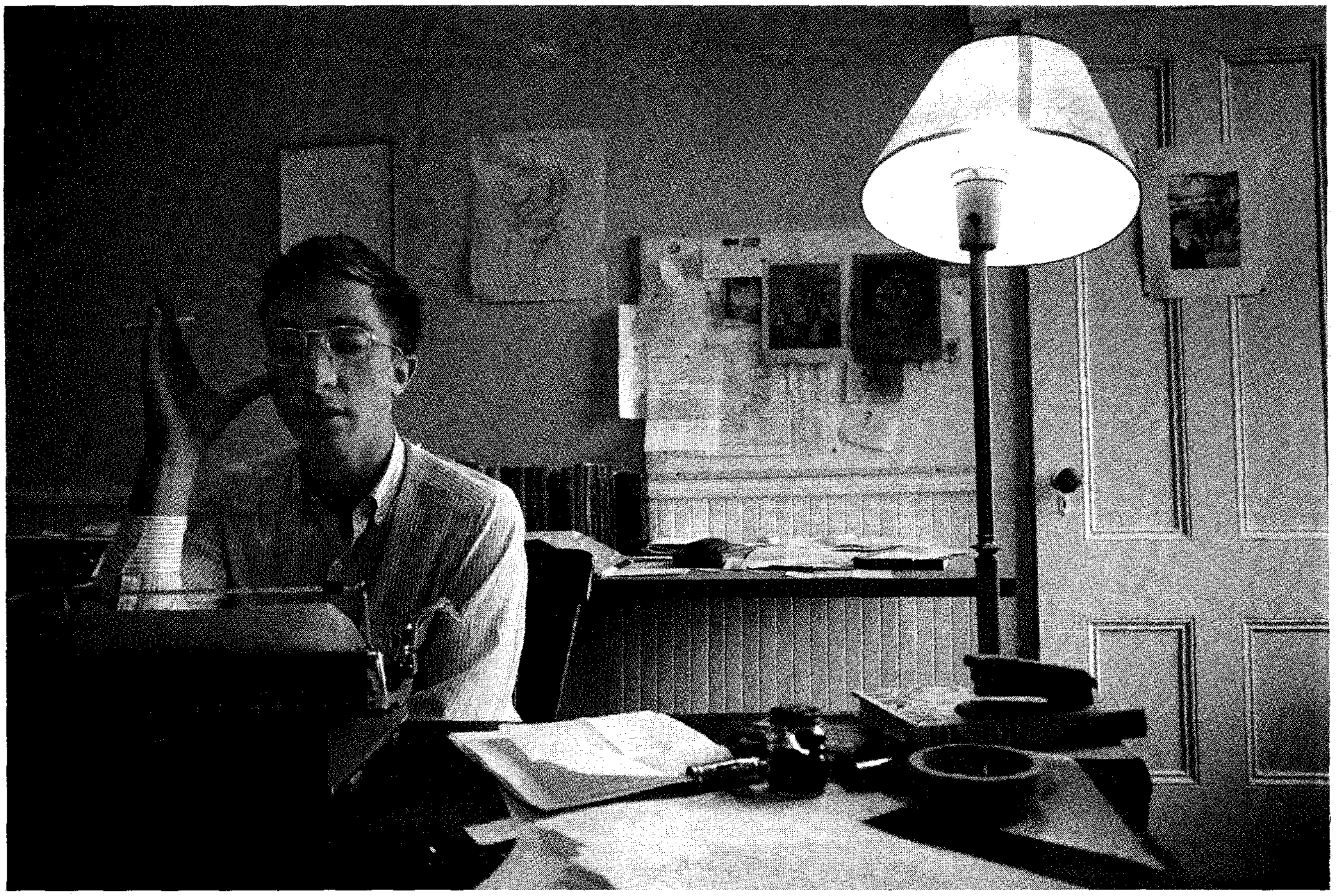
# TRUE STORY

*The art of short fiction.*

BY LOUIS MENAND

I am not one who golfs. The only time I tried it I was confident that a dozen balls would be an adequate supply. This is the sport of retired people: how hard could it be? The confidence was misplaced, also, one by one, the balls, and I had to quit somewhere around the seventh hole. On the sixth, actually, I hit a car—there was absolutely no reason for a highway to be that close to a golf course—but that's another story. The point is that the game did not yield up its mystery to me; I remain, in the golfing universe, a child of darkness. I do find that I am able to watch golf on television, however, where it is possible to experience a serenity that the game itself sadly lacks. Spread out on a couch and indifferent to the outcome (very important), you watch tiny white orbs sail improbable distances over the biggest lawns in the world, interrupted occasionally by advertisements for expensive cars. One of the players is named Tiger. Another is named Love. If you have access to a pitcher of Martinis (optional), the bliss potential can be quite huge.

There is usually a price for pleasure so mindless. In the case of TV golf, it is listening to the commentators analyze the players' swings. What looks to you like a single, continuous, and not difficult act is revealed, via slow motion and a sort of virtual-chalkboard graphics, to be a sequence of intricately calibrated adjustments of shoulder to hip, head to arm, elbow to wrist, and so on. Where you see fluidity, the experts see geometry; what to you is nature is machinery to them—parallel lines, extended planes, points of impact. They murder to dissect. Yet, apparently, these minute and individualized calibrations make all the difference between being able reliably to land a golf ball in an area, three hundred yards away, the size of a bathmat and, say, randomly hitting a car, which, let's face it, only a fool would drive right next to a golf course. There is a major disproportion, in other words, between the straightforwardness of the game—hit the ball, trudge after it, hit it again, until it ends up in a hole in the ground, a fitting activity, possibly too fitting, for retirement—and the fantastic precision required to play it, a disproportion mastered by a difficult but, to the ordinary observer, almost invisible technique.

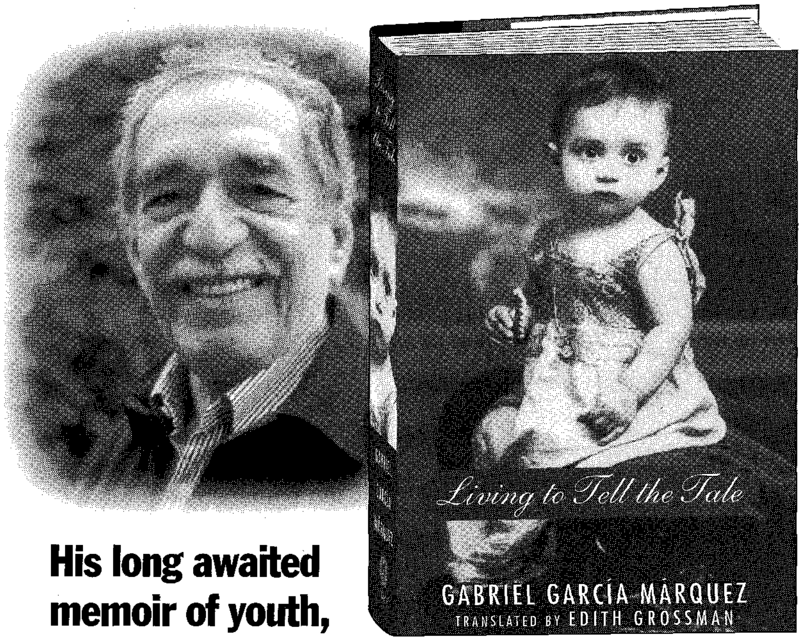


*John Updike's first hundred and three stories, it turns out, can be read almost as a continuous narrative. Photograph by Dennis Stock.*

Short stories are the same. A short story is not as restrictive as a sonnet, but, of all the literary forms, it is possibly the most single-minded. Its aim, as it was identified by the modern genre's first theorist, Edgar Allan Poe, is to create "an effect"—by which Poe meant something almost physical, like a sensation or (the term is appropriate, since Poe's reputation was always greater in France than in his own country) a *frisson*. Every word in a story, Poe said, is in the service of this effect. It's all about (and after this we will bury the analogy) getting the ball in the hole with the fewest strokes possible. Sometimes the fewest can be a lot, but at the end there has to be the literary equivalent of the magician's puff of smoke, an outcome that is both startling and anticipated. The reader of a story expects an effect, and expects to be surprised by it, too. If you try to name the sensations that stories deliver, you find yourself with the sort of terms that (if you were a college teacher) you would write "vague" or "ugh" next to when you saw them in a paper: a pang, a shiver, a mental click, or what you might call (if you were a college student) a general sense of "*Whoa*." *Whoa* is not exactly a term of art. You know it when you feel it, though.

The difficulty of putting into words the effect a story produces is part of the point. The story is words; the effect is wordless, or, at best, *whoa*. James Joyce called the effect an "epiphany," a term whose theological connotations have led, over the years, to a lot of critical misunderstanding. What Joyce meant by an epiphany was, he said, just "a revelation of the whatness of a thing"—a sudden apprehension of the way the world unmediatedly is. Language being one of the principal means by which the world is mediated, the epiphany is an experience beyond (or after, or without) words. "Snow was general all over Ireland." The sentence is as banal and literal as a weather report. (In fact, in the story it *is* a weather report.) But if "The Dead" works, then that sentence, when it comes, triggers the exact shiver of recognition that Joyce wants you to have.

"The Early Stories" (Knopf; $35) is a collection of all but four of the short stories that John Updike wrote between 1953, when he was twenty-one, and 1975. Most were published in *The New Yorker*. The four missing pieces, according to the author's foreword, are two stories already collected



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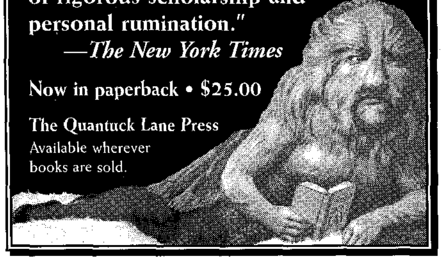

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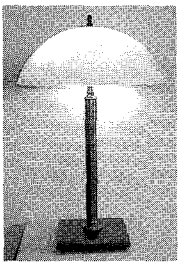

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in the recent volume "Golf Dreams" (it's not clear why that should be a reason for exclusion, since every other story has appeared in a book before, too) and two that Updike says seem "topical" and "dated" (again, a somewhat arbitrary application of principle). There is one Henry Bech story, "The Bulgarian Poetess"; it is included, Updike explains, because it was written before he had it in mind to make a book of Bech stories. This crowd management nets out at a hundred and three stories, which is a remarkable number considering that there are still twenty-eight years, and counting, to go. V. S. Pritchett published eighty-two stories in his entire career and lived to be ninety-six.

Reading the stories straight through reveals a striking thing, which is that you can read the stories straight through. They present themselves (with some exceptions, mostly experimental or whimsical, which are bundled into a separate section headed "Far Out") as a shadow autobiography. The names of the characters change, of course, and the circumstances vary, but if you read the volume as a single narrative, which is the way it has been arranged, you find that it follows the experiences of a man who spends his childhood in southeastern Pennsylvania, goes off to Harvard, studies in England, marries while still a young man, moves to New York City and then to a town north of Boston, has several children, and, after twenty years of marriage, gets divorced—a man whose path through that chunk of the twentieth century is a lot like John Updike's.

Is the inner life the same? Not for us to say. The boy, youth, unmarried man, husband, father, and divorcé of the stories (there is one, terrific story, called "Killing," written from a woman's point of view) is, typically, someone who stands in a subtly, almost imperceptibly askew relation to the normal—someone who believes in the normal, who *wants* to believe in the normal and aspires to nothing more, but who always seems one size too small or too large for the fit. This person is thoughtful and well educated, although (unlike his creator) he is never a prodigy. He is not smarter than everyone else—that is not his problem. His tastes do not deviate from everyone else's tastes. He smokes;

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### THE SNOW ARRIVES AFTER LONG SILENCE

The snow arrives after long silence
from its high home where nothing leaves
tracks or stains or keeps time.
The sky it fell from, pale as oatmeal,
bears up like sheep before shearing.

The cat at my window watches
amazed. So many feathers and no bird!
All day the snow sets its table
with clean linen, putting its house
in order. The hungry deer walk

on the risen loaves of snow.
You can follow the broken hearts
their hooves punch in its crust.
Night after night the big plows rumble
and bale it like dirty laundry

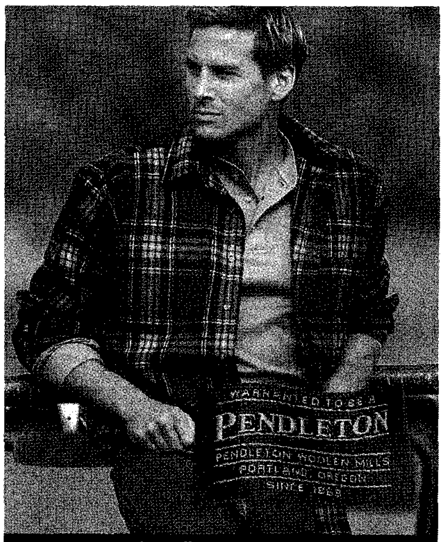
and haul it to the Hudson.
Now I scan the sky for snow,
and the cool cheek it offers me,
and its body, thinned into petals,
and the still caves where it sleeps.

—*Nancy Willard*

he enjoys a drink; he has an eye for conventionally pretty women; he is uxorious even with his mistresses; he loves his kids. He is a liberal whom sixties liberalism makes grouchy, partly because he thinks that sixties liberals take themselves too seriously, but mostly because he is grateful for the amenities of American middle-class life and doesn't understand why it is fashionable to tear that life down. ("America," as the narrator of one of these stories explains, "is a vast conspiracy to make you happy.") What makes him different, what accounts for the persistent askewness, is really just one thing, which is that he is haunted by death.

It's a haunted genre. Goosebumps was undoubtedly one of the effects that Poe had in mind when he wrote about how stories work, and, far from being a debased or merely popular kind of story, the ghost story is almost the paradigm of the form. Many of the great story writers in English, besides Poe, wrote ghost stories. Some of these—Henry James's "The Jolly Corner," Rudyard Kipling's "The Phantom Rickshaw"—are literally stories about ghosts or ghostly things. But many famous stories—"The Beast in the Jungle," "Mary Postgate," "The Secret Sharer"—are stories of haunting. "The Dead" is a story about a haunting, by the ghost of Michael Furey. The supernatural lurks around the form. The stories of O. Henry and H. H. Munro, even more popular, probably, than ghost stories, are essentially *whoa* effects produced by the suggestion of the operation of some sort of supernatural agent. J. D. Salinger was by no means above confecting this sort of thrill: he does it with the empty swimming pool in "Teddy."

For the most part, of course, the contemporary story keeps the supernatural safely concealed below the floorboards. But this only makes the obsession with death more evocative, since death now appears as simple annihilation, pure absence. The petty form (so to speak) of death in stories is tied up with the emotions of loss and nostalgia. Updike is a master of these moods. One of his best-known stories is called "The Happiest I've Been," written in



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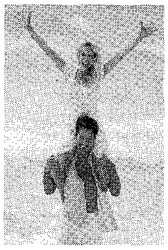
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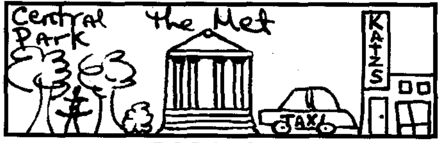

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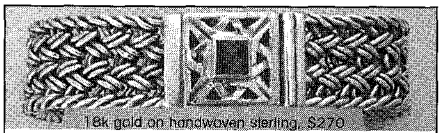
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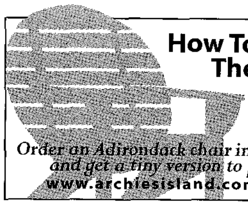
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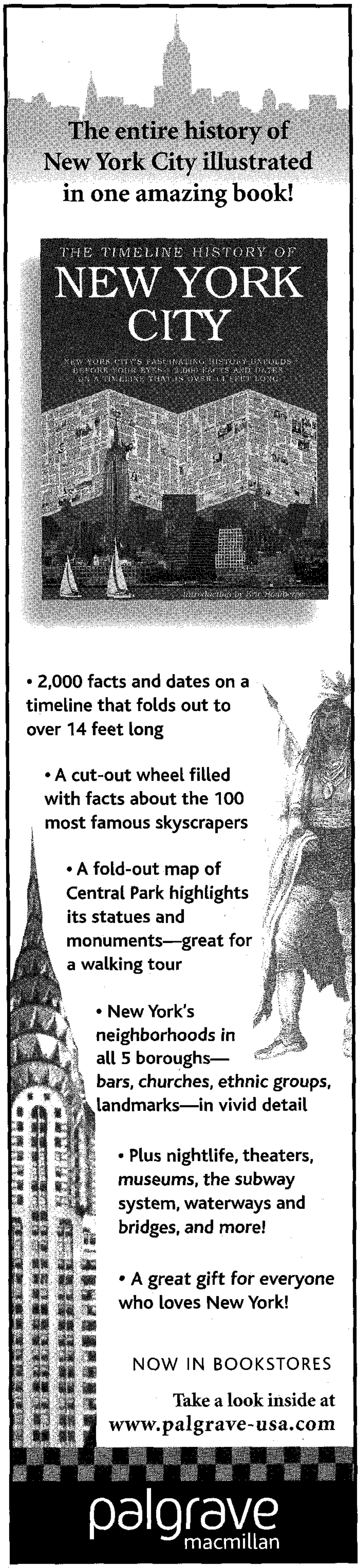

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1958. (It was in a volume, published in 1964 but long out of print, called "Olinger Stories," all of which were based on Updike's Pennsylvania years. These eleven stories belong with Updike's finest work; they are classics, and Updike himself says that one reason for collecting "The Early Stories" was to have them together in print again.) "The Happiest I've Been" is a longish (for Updike) story about a young man who goes to a party the night he is leaving his home town and driving to Chicago to meet the woman he expects to marry. The "happiest" moment is the moment, after the party, when he gets on the highway, at dawn, and sets off for Chicago. The tug (*ugh! better term!*) comes with the realization that he is describing these events years later—that is, after his reunion with the woman he was planning to marry.

The grand form of death in stories has to do with Joyce's notion of "the whatness of a thing." It is reflected in the kind of flatness or coldness that you find in the stories of Ernest Hemingway or Raymond Carver. Another way to describe the apprehension of the whatness of a thing is to say that it is a realization of what the world would look like if you were dead. Consciousness is an interminable yakking, a frantic effort to keep up appearances, to make the game seem always to be *your* game. If the yakking suddenly stopped, if you were, from that point of view, dead, then the world would appear without aura and without affect—a clattering movie projector, a machine for churning out illusions. Hemingway's "The Big Two-Hearted River" is a story about the fear of this happening. So is Updike's "Pigeon Feathers" (1960), in which a boy sets out to exterminate the pigeons in the family barn.

Updike has another great story in this mode, called "Transaction" (1973). "Transaction" is not a *New Yorker* story; it made its first appearance in *Oui*, a now defunct organ of the old *Playboy* Weltanschauung. The reason is that it recounts, in every detail, a man's evening with a prostitute. It's an oddity that Updike has spent his career as a writer for *The New Yorker*, a magazine long notable for its prudery, since carnality is as great a theme for him as it is for Norman Mailer or Philip Roth. William Shawn is supposed to have rejected "Goodbye, Columbus" because it includes a reference to a diaphragm. He would not have needed to get very far into "Transaction" to reach an editorial judgment. In the story, the man and the woman, after a few false starts—he has had too much to drink—consummate, earnestly, gratefully, but joylessly, their interlude, each element of which is carefully transcribed, down to the texture of the labia. There is a hint of affection between them when it is over, but the man is glad to see the prostitute go. She has left him, Updike says, a gift. "What she had given him, delicately, was death. She had made sex finite." She has made him see sex as she sees it, from the outside, an act without aura, stripped to its corporal elements. Updike (needless to say) puts it more beautifully: "Always, until now, it had been too much, bigger than all systems, an empyrean as absolute as those first boyish orgasms, when his hand would make his soul pass through a bliss as dense as an ingot of gold. Now, at last, in the prime of life, he saw through it, into the spaces between the stars."

In his foreword, Updike names some of the short-story writers he regards as influences. He says that his main debt—he concedes that it might not be obvious—is to Hemingway. It's not obvious, actually. Hemingway showed writers of Updike's generation what the story's possibilities were, and (having a highly professional view of the business) instructed them in a few rules of craft—the importance of suppressing information, and the use of dialogue to convey significance, so that a conversation about a cat in the rain, for example, becomes the anatomy of a marriage. But Updike is more generous with description than Hemingway, and more generous, too, with commentary. He is not superstitious about pointing a moral: he doesn't think it will ruin the effect if he puts the upshot in a nutshell. One of his greatest stories, "A & P" (1960), about a kid working at a supermarket checkout counter when three girls wearing bathing suits walk in, ends with the words "I felt how hard the world was going to be to me from here on in." Hemingway would probably not have given his character this thought, or would not have permit-

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ted him to express it. But it is the sentence—in a story that somehow squeezes the whole pathos of Cold War life into a tiny, perfect anecdote—that produces the click.

The god of *New Yorker* fiction when Updike arrived on the scene was Salinger, and a couple of the "Early Stories" are Salingeresque (though by no means imitations): "Who Made Roses Yellow?" (1956), "His Finest Hour" (also 1956). "Friends from Philadelphia" (1954), the first story *The New Yorker* bought, is the only one with a true O. Henry ending (though Updike says, in the foreword, that the ending owed something to Salinger). As a stylist, Updike is very close to Nabokov, whom he lists, along with half a dozen other writers, as someone he learned from, and with whom he shares an almost religious commitment to linguistic hyper-clarity. But the figure Updike is naggingly reminiscent of—naggingly, because Updike is so American a writer that you feel he should spring from an exclusively American provenance—is Joyce. The first story in the volume, "You'll Never Know, Dear, How Much I Love You" (1960), is surely indebted to Joyce's "Araby." "Wife-Wooing" (1960), practically a hymn to uxoriousness, begins with a recollection of Molly Bloom snapping her garter. But everywhere you find the Eucharistic metaphor that was the heart of Joyce's aesthetics: mimesis as the transubstantiation of dead matter into spirit. "Ulysses" opens with a mock Mass, and the title story of Updike's collection "The Music School" (1966) is probably as explicit on the subject as a writer should allow himself to become. "The world is the host," the narrator says; "it must be chewed." Which is why normal life, if it could truly be entered into, without anxiety, would be enough, and why, since it never can be truly entered into without anxiety, we have these stories.

The earliest story in the collection, written in 1953 while Updike was a senior at Harvard, is called "Ace in the Hole." The Ace of the title is a young guy who was once the star of the Olinger High basketball team, and is now working in a car lot and married to an unhappy wife with whom he has a fussy baby girl—the ur-Rabbit. By 1953, Up-

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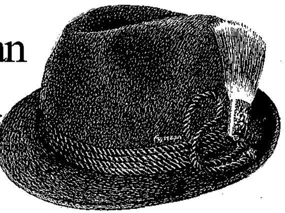

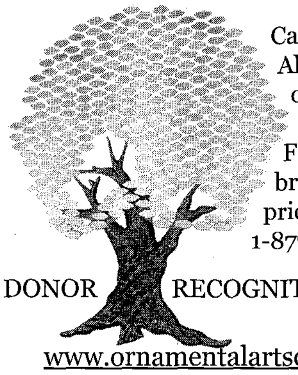

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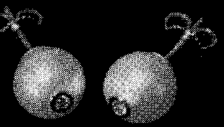

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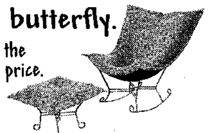

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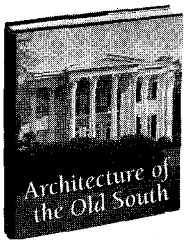

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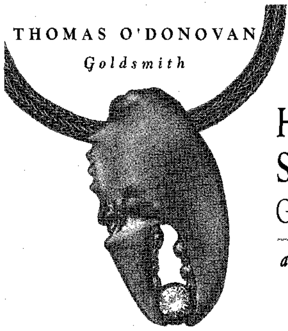

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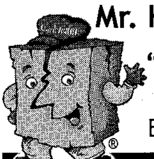

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dike had set on its novelistic track the character whose story would occupy him for almost fifty years. Rabbit, like Updike, is one who golfs. There is a memorable scene in "Rabbit, Run" in which Rabbit plays a game of golf with the local Episcopalian minister. The game is an excuse for a conversation about Rabbit's reasons for abandoning his wife and child. Rabbit struggles to name the object of his transcendental itch, but the best he can come up with is "it." The minister begins to ridicule him a little. Rabbit, annoyed, tees up and, to his surprise, hits a monster drive. The swing is perfect; the ball just keeps going and going down the fairway. He turns to the minister. "That's *it!*" he says. "That's it." It is the expected unexpected.

Shortness, as it happens, is a salient feature of the short story. You do not lose yourself in a story the way you can in a novel; it's too short to put down and pick up later. It is therefore a field in which virtuosity can flourish, since attention to the writing is never far from the experience of reading. There is something beyond language, the story seems to say, but only language, only *this* language, can disclose it. Updike is a virtuoso, and "The Early Stories" is in one respect an enormous showroom of Updike sentences, with their lovely curves and shiny details. Updike doesn't describe only things; he is a brilliant describer of sound, too. Virtuosity can seem a distraction—as when you find that you are thinking about how great the musician is instead of listening to the music. In stories, though, this is never a problem. The whole idea is to make language perform its own little supernatural act, which is to turn marks on a page into an emotion, an effect, an apparition of something that is not there, a ghost. You could say that the complexity of the machinery used to produce this is hidden beneath the surface of the writing, except that the writing *is* the machinery, just as sex *is* only bodies. The satisfaction comes from the creation of a feeling where there was no feeling, only words, or flesh, or golf balls. People like Updike, or Tiger Woods, make you aware, by what they do, that this satisfaction is possible in life, and that it can be as supreme a satisfaction as there is. They almost turn to us when it's done, as if to say, "That's *it.*" ♦

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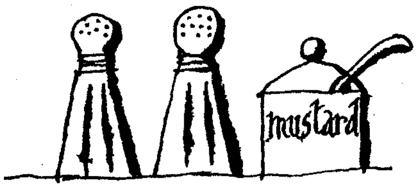
03

# BRIEFLY NOTED

The Liberated Bride, *by A. B. Yehoshua, translated from the Hebrew by Hillel Halkin (Harcourt; $27).* The three brides at the center of this gentle novel all refuse to do what Yochanan Rivlin, an aging Israeli professor of Near Eastern studies, wishes them to do. Samaher, a depressed Palestinian graduate student who is newly married, won't finish her seminar paper; Galya, soon to be a mother, won't tell him why she divorced his son; and Rivlin's wife, Hagit, a district judge, won't let him worry himself to death about it. Yehoshua, the most daring of the major Israeli writers, tells a simple story about a region that complicates all it touches. As Rivlin's obsession with his son's failed marriage grows, he also finds himself drawn into the world of his Palestinian student. The uxtaposition of a failed marriage and the turmoil of Israeli society suggests pointed political commentary, but Yehoshua's portrait of the hesitant courtship between the two peoples—sometimes tender and generous, sometimes grotesque and caamitous—remains, somehow, hopeful.

Double Vision, *by Pat Barker (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $23).* Kate Frobisher is a recently widowed sculptor, who, temporarily crippled by a car accident, is forced to employ help to complete a fifteen-foot sculpture of Christ. Nearby lives a colleague of her late husband, a foreign correspondent who is taking a break from Bosnia and Afghanistan to write a book about "ways of representing war." In his downtime, he philosophizes with Kate about voyeurism and human suffering. There are flashes in Barker's tenth novel of the electrifying prose that readers have come to expect from her. But its central preoccupation, with social and moral vision, is shamelessly heavy-handed, and the novel is further encumbered by a jumble of lacklustre minor characters and grand themes.



In the Land of Magic Soldiers: A Story of White and Black in West Africa, *by Daniel Bergner (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $22).* The black and the white of Bergner's title are, on the one hand, the victims of the seemingly endless civil war in Sierra Leone and, on the other, the missionaries, aid workers, and British soldiers who arrive to restore hope. Bergner follows such bleak narratives as that of Lamin, a husband and father whose hands were chopped off by the rebels, and Komba, a child soldier who calmly describes eating a victim's heart. While an eloquent witness, Bergner has little to offer in the way of sophisticated political explanation. He does, however, have a journalist's eye for the telling moment; in one scene, amputees, coming to the polls to vote, pose happily for the cameras, while a member of the CNN crew says casually that the segment probably won't air in America.

Yoshimasa and the Silver Pavilion, *by Donald Keene (Columbia; $29.95).* This enterprising account by the doyen of Japan studies demonstrates that the quintessential Japanese aesthetic—which characterizes Noh drama, sand gardens, monochrome ink painting, shoji panels, tatami floors, and the tea ceremony—was the creation of a staggeringly incompetent fifteenth-century shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimasa. His military record was dismal and his domestic life a shambles: his domineering wife abandoned him, his nanny (who probably doubled as his mistress) may have intrigued against him, and a favorite concubine took up with his dissolute son. While warfare destroyed Kyoto and the corpses of famine victims clogged the Kamo River, Yoshimasa squandered his treasury, bringing obsessive perfectionism to such matters as perfume blending. He ultimately abdicated to become a Buddhist priest, devoting himself to the development of the restrained, Zen-influenced style exemplified in his famous Silver Pavilion. Keene's multifarious learning and engaging manner illuminate the improbable story of the fastidious aesthete whose taste has been so important in forming the look of the modern world.

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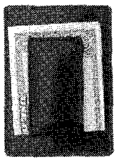

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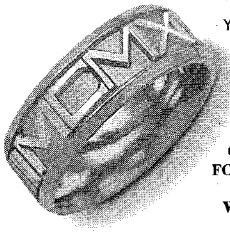

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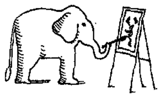

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BOOKS

# THIS OLD HOUSE

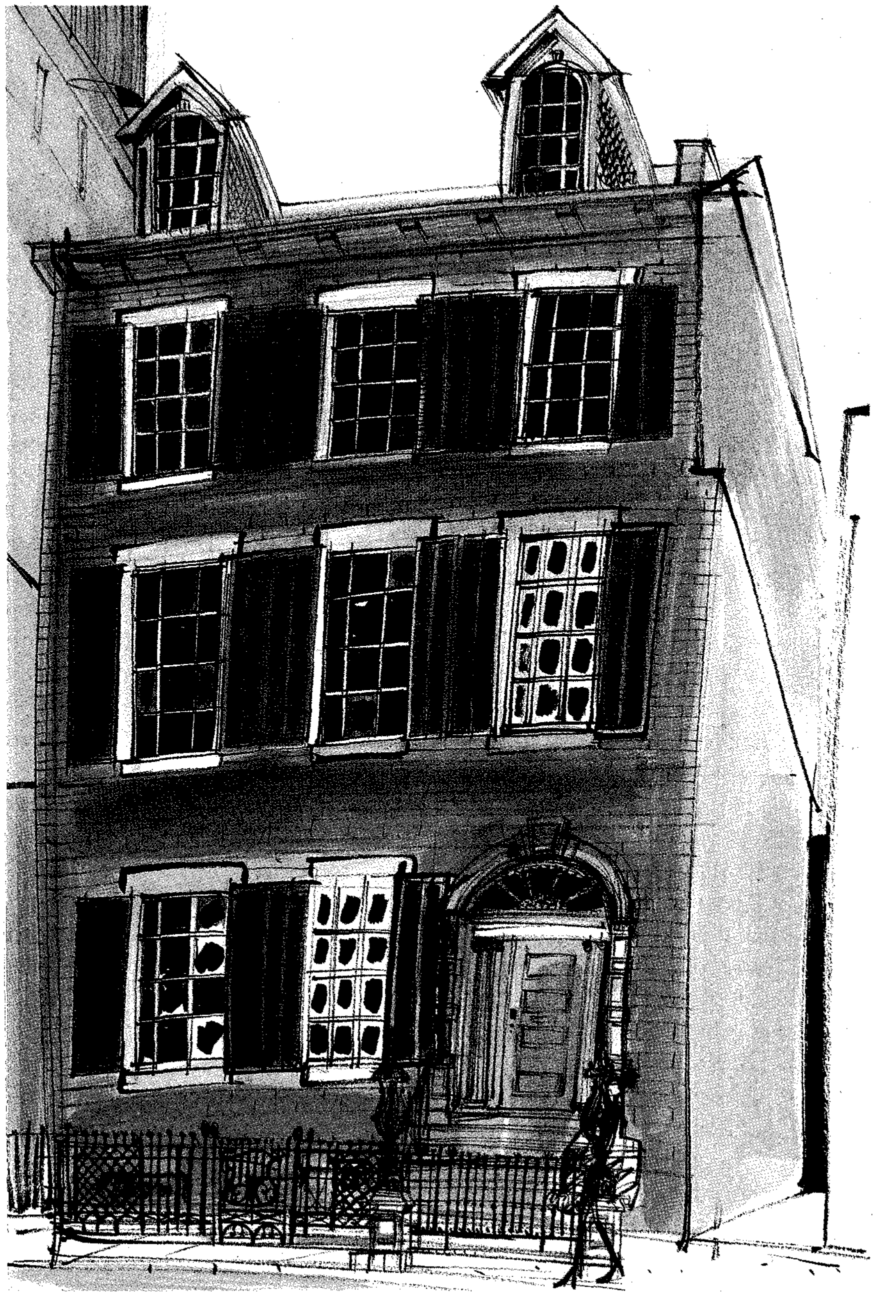
*Living more or less the way Wharton and James did.*

BY JUDITH THURMAN

At midday on March 6, 1970, Charles Lockwood, a senior at Princeton, and his friend Robert Mayer, a photographer, were taking pictures of a particularly fine Greek Revival doorway on West Eleventh Street in Greenwich Village for Lockwood's undergraduate thesis on the history of New York row houses (three-to-five-story attached dwellings of brick or brownstone, most of them built in the nineteenth century). Their work was interrupted by an explosion at the Fifth Avenue end of the block followed by a terrific shock wave. Quickly deciding to document whatever disaster had taken place, they ran toward the flames and debris spewing from No. 18, shot a roll of film, and brought it to the *Times*, which printed one of the pictures on the front page the next morning. Lockwood and Mayer learned that the blasted house (also a Greek Revival gem), which burned to the ground when the gas lines ignited, was owned by a Midwestern media mogul named James Wilkerson, whose daughter Cathlyn was a member of the Weathermen. She and her comrades were using the basement as a "bomb factory," and, through inexpertness or bad luck, they had blown themselves up. I was working in Union Square that spring, and I often walked past the site. After the rubble was cleared and before the new owner of the lot erected an anomalous modern house on it—with diagonally canted bay windows that obscurely commemorated the explosion—the gaping hole between Nos. 16 and 20 depressed me. It was as if a healthy tooth had been extracted violently from a familiar smile, transforming it into the grimace of a memento mori.

In 1972, Lockwood's much expanded thesis was published as a book, "Bricks and Brownstone: The New York Row House, 1783-1929," illustrated by Mayer's photographs, and it became a bible for buffs, architects, and preservationists. It has just been reissued by Rizzoli ($75), with sixty-six new color plates by Madeleine Isom, a section suggesting walkin tours of the best row-house blocks in Brooklyn and Manhattan, and an introduction by Paul Goldberger. Though Lockwood describes the explosion on West Eleventh Street as an isolated adventure, the story he tells is that of the demographic explosions and economic shock waves that have transformed New York City. The row house is an artifact o the same periods, culture, and upheavals that shaped the novel. They originate together in the late eighteenth century and a hundred years afterward jointly arrive at a golden age. The serene frontage of a venerable street in Murray Hil or Park Slope—the consensus expressed by its aesthetic unity about what constitutes moral virtue—is an image for the predicament of a stifled James hero or a warped Wharton heroine struggling against prudery and beholdenness to break the social mold. From Lockwood's work, a contemporary novelist migh construct a narrative about the enduring intrigue, romance, poison, and nuance of class privilege—the rise and fall of the house of Wilkerson. It would conside the way that successive American generations ruthlessly desecrate the past so that their rootless heirs will have something to idealize.

In one of Louis Auchincloss's many fictions that treat or at least graze the same theme, a patrician hero suffers a reversal of fortune and moves his famil from Park Avenue to much humble quarters: a small brownstone on an unfashionable street in the East Eighties—making do there, as I recall, with a skeleton staff of a cook and a maid, and adjusting to the disgrace of being déclassé. Their stoicism in having to crowd themselves into four floors amused me when I read the story, for I was, at the time, subletting a studio that had once been the third-best bedroom of a grand



*Vo. 29 East Fourth Street—a Federal-style row house built for the Tredwell family n 1832—lost its neighbors, but has survived as the Merchant's House Museum.*

ouse on East Tenth Street—a residence f the sort that Auchincloss characters re born in or inherit and take for granted ntil fate serves them an eviction notice. hough I once briefly owned a Tribeca oft (before the neighborhood was deeloped), I had, like everyone normal, pent my entire New York life in a shoeox. There was a sordid hovel on East irst Street that was torched during the nmolation-murder of a Hell's Angel; railroad flat on a gang-infested block n the West Eighties; a garret in Litle Italy where I shared a toilet in the all with the drag queen next door; a lerelict though charming former pushcart stable; and an illegal crash pad in a brick firetrap above an Irish bar on Water Street, where I cohabited with a jazz trombonist and his roommate, a baby-faced heroin addict. Below us lived two elderly Collyer-like brothers who never saw the light of day and who, for fifty years, had been collecting manhole covers, pornography, cigar boxes, orthopedic prostheses, and the carcasses of old radios. If there were, in 1970, any other residents of the Financial District, they were moles, like the brothers, and we never saw them. My mother, who never saw me, thought I was studying Milton while rooming with a wid-

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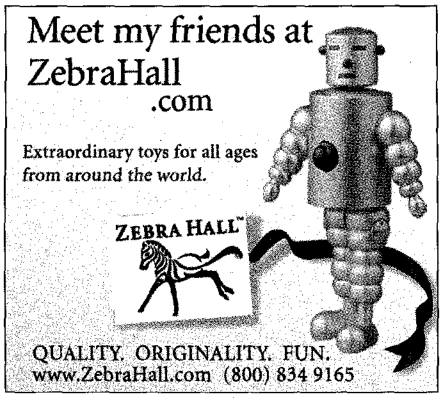
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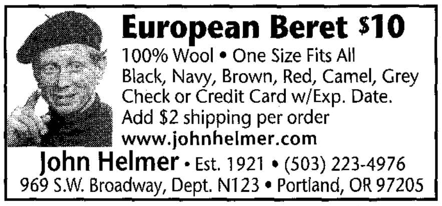
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owed piano teacher on Riverside Drive.

I eventually outgrew my youthful contempt for "bourgeois," which is to say, habitable, apartments, though never for those in modern buildings. Like Charles Lockwood, but without his sense of purpose, I roamed the brownstone blocks of lower Manhattan and Brooklyn Heights, often at dusk, just as the lights came on and before the shades were drawn, peeping into the parlor windows of old houses inhabited by rich bohemians, and lusting for a saffron-yellow library with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves and a sliding ladder; a gilt pier glass with chipped gesso above an Eastlake mantle; French doors opening to a little balcony or a cobbled patio; a lumpy recamier with a broken leg propped up by an unabridged dictionary; slanting pine floors; a high ceiling with a plaster rosette; a spitting fire; and a piano in the corner under which slept a shaggy dog. I was gratified to read in "Bricks and Brownstone" that James Fenimore Cooper was an errant voyeur of my ilk. "There is," he writes in "Notions of the Americans" (1828), "a species of second-rate, genteel houses, that abound in New York, into which I have looked when passing with the utmost pleasure. They have, as usual, a story that is half sunk in the earth . . . and two floors above. The tenants of these are chiefly merchants, or professional men, in moderate circumstances, who pay rents of from $300 to $500 a year. You know that no American who is at all comfortable in life will share his dwelling with another." The relish with which he describes the tasteful opulence of these mediocre houses' mahogany appointments suggests that he did more ogling from the sidewalk than passing by. Fashions in and prices of New York real estate are, as one knows, eminently labile, but the habit of yearning for a poetic old house is so ingrained in some of us—me, in particular—that I sometimes forget I have one.

My own reversals of fortune are too predictable to relate, but my son and I now live in a narrow Yorkville brownstone with a deep garden dominated by a majestic elm that has miraculously weathered the epidemics that have decimated its species. Our house has also weathered the epidemics—of decay, development, and conversion—that have decimated its species, and about which
Lockwood writes with artless passion anc
consummate authority. It is part of a rov
built in the early eighteen-seventies fo
middle-class families, possibly those o
the foremen or managers at the Rupper
Brewery, which opened in 1867 and was
for a century, a major employer of th
neighborhood's German and Hungariai
immigrants. In 2003, one needs real nerv
to call any single-family house in Man
hattan second-rate genteel, though min
was originally not even that. It is fiftee
feet wide (most town houses are fron
three to ten feet wider), with two room
to a floor and a basement that was onc
the coal cellar. One block to the east,
"better" class of native New Yorker live
in more lavish dwellings with "Englisl
basements" and Anglo-Italianate façade
My son, however, doesn't care about sucl
nice, and in any case antiquated, socia
distinctions: he complains that we hav
too much room (and perhaps we di
until a friend gave him a drum set), an
wishes that, "like everybody else," w
lived in an ordinary, two-bedroom apart
ment. To console him for the embarrass
ments of privilege, I make him do chore
and one is to lock up at night. In th
dead of winter, when the dogs are howl
ing in the back yards and the wind i
high, he sometimes guiltily professes
desire for a doorman. We bought th
house—and it's why we could—at a mo
ment when most New Yorkers were, lik
my son, wary of a shadowy garden,
front door that opened from the stree
into their kitchen, and bedroom win
dows accessible by a painter's ladder. In
security, however, is a luxury on which
never economize.

Having studied Lockwood's tex
with relative assiduity, I set out on
morning shod in cross-trainers to giv
my reading comprehension a pop quiz.
wasn't sanguine about my powers of dis
cernment, as I've failed similar exercise
in the Central Park Ramble, where
practice bird-watching for dummies an
am scarcely able to distinguish a roo
from a duck. There are fewer principa
styles of New York row-house architec
ture than avian species, though there ar
still plenty: red brick Federal (the earli
est and the sparest of ornament); Gree
Revival (fluted columns with Doric o
Ionic capitals are the giveaway); Gothi
Revival (creepy); Italianate (the classi

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brownstone with protruding stoop); Second Empire (mansard roof); Neo-Grec ("squared-off forms and incised detail"); Queen Anne (asymmetrical and gloomy, with recessed porches); Romanesque (rounded arches and Byzantine leafwork); Renaissance (pale limestone or yellow brick with fancy pilasters); Colonial Revival (fanlight windows); and my favorite multiple-choice option—"Eclectic." A few "countrified" wooden frame houses still exist, as does the odd brick dwelling with a crenellated Dutch gable. I was quickly able to identify a steel-and-concrete private house with walls of translucent glass as an homage to modernism, but I found it difficult to tell one nineteenth-century style from another—partly, of course, because so few row houses are still virginal. My own, for example, which should, in principle, have been budget Italianate, was deflowered by a fashionable architect in the nineteen-thirties, who performed a "neoclassical" makeover inside and out—stripping the façade of its stoop, cornice, and lintels, and the interiors of their black-walnut woodwork and florid detail. Thus have innumerable overwrought maidens been relieved of heavy petticoats and transformed into women of the world.

I know that one should resist the impulse to anthropomorphize, but town houses have a presence and a civility missing from more monolithic forms of residential real estate, particularly high-rise apartment buildings. Those "human" qualities are obviously a function of scale, age, and the imprint of hand labor, though perhaps not merely. The mien of old houses—their solidarity and defiance as survivors—makes them seem animate. There are graffiti-scarred terraces in Hell's Kitchen that remind me of painted girls in shabby finery (most hopelessly degraded, a few improbably intact) lined up in a cheap dance hall. There are uniform brown ranks in Fort Greene as solemn about their virile dignity as a phalanx of cadets in their class picture. One of the functions of a high rise is to deflect curiosity and contamination, and it returns one's gaze with the stony inscrutability of a thing. I've always felt that there was something inherently soulful about row houses, and, with Lockwood's help, I can now say what: a house may guard the mystery of its inner life, but its face invites us to imagine that it has one. ♦

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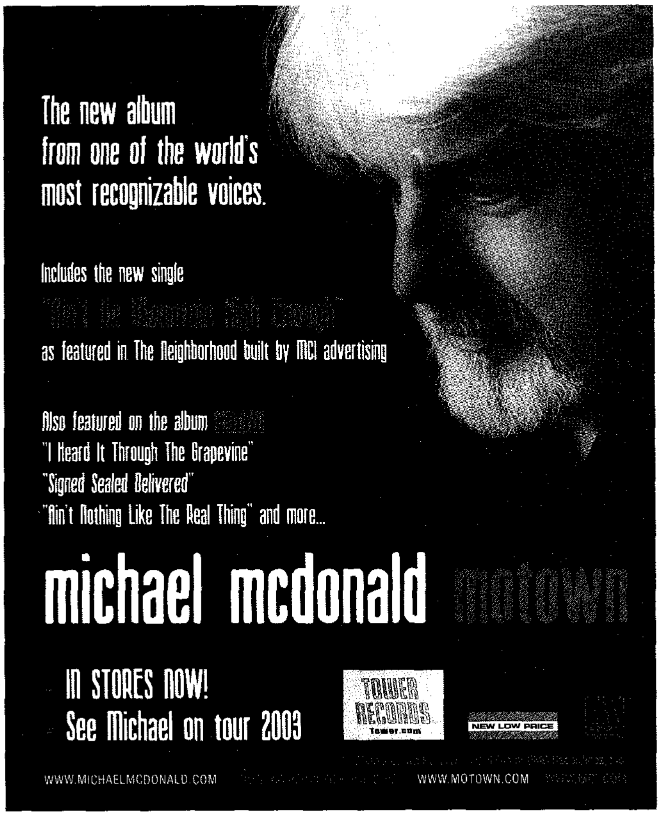

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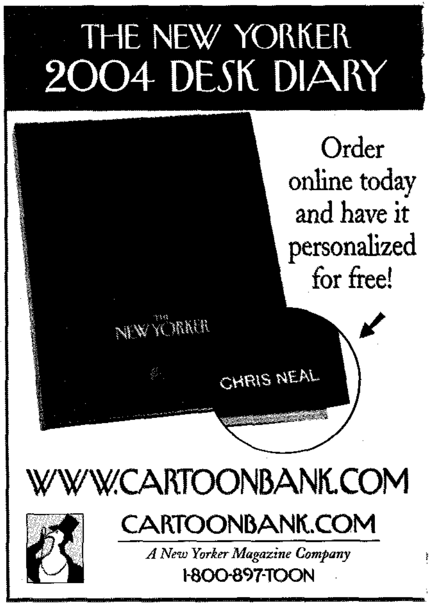

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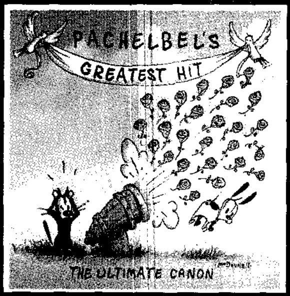

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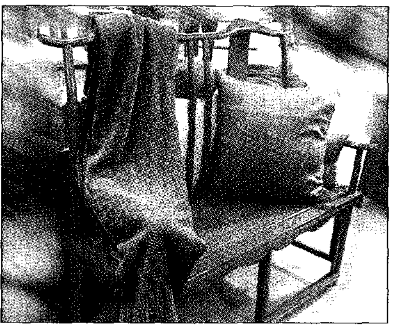

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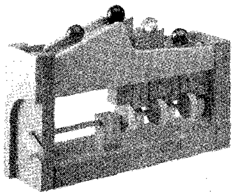

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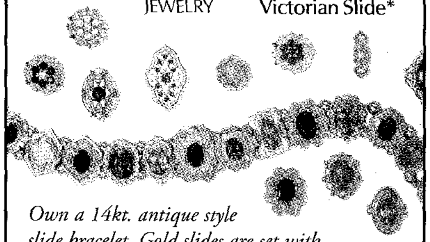

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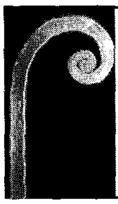
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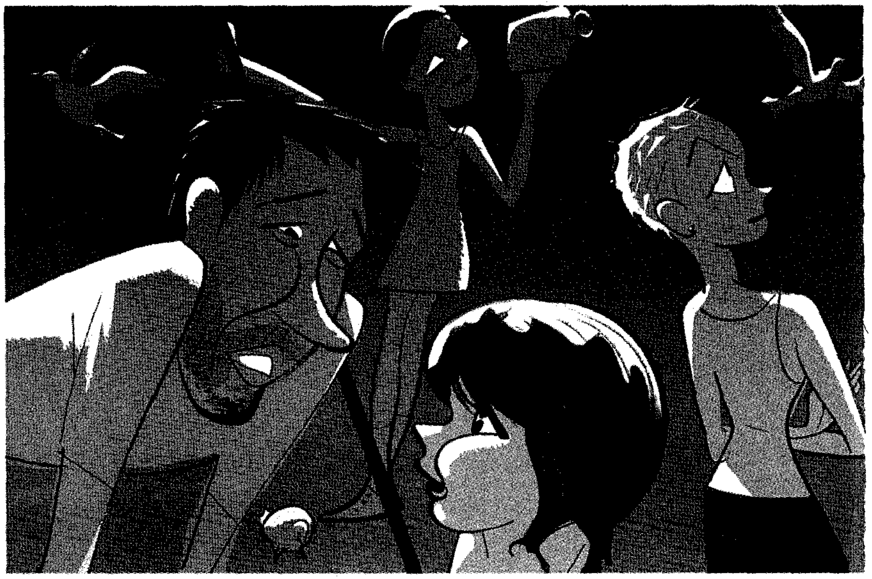
### THE CURRENT CINEMA

# STRANGE LANDS

*"In America" and "The Triplets of Belleville."*

BY ANTHONY LANE

We are not told when "In America" takes place, but, given that a family is seen going to the movies to watch "E.T.," we are presumably being lured back to the early nineteen-eighties. The sense of period is far from overwhelming, although I can't deny a faint, Don Johnson-like itch to turn up the collar of my opalescent jacket and roll the sleeves back to the elbow. The family consists of Johnny (Paddy Considine), his wife, Sarah (Samantha Morton), and their young daughters, Christy (Sarah Bolger) and Ariel (Emma Bolger). They are Irish, and they have quit their native land in favor of New York. What they have come for, beyond illegal residence, is never quite clear, but we know what they are leaving behind: the memory of Frankie, the youngest child, who died of a brain tumor, and to whom Christy still addresses her prayers.



*Paddy Considine, Sarah Bolger, Emma Bolger, and Samantha Morton.*

The film proceeds with a stop-start motion, as if it lacked enough gas for a certifiable plot. This may be deliberate; you could argue that plotlessness is the family's problem, as they fight to lend thrust and purpose to their survival in a foreign land. And thus we get the searc for a home, which ends when they luc into a rotting loft in Hell's Kitchen, wit a fine in-house display of notable junkie We also get the job hunt—an unequ affair, I thought, with Johnny, a fruitle actor, grinding his way through aud tions, while Sarah, a qualified teache waits tables at a local ice-cream parlo Finally, we get a new baby, and, as wit all movie births, we are torn betwee moist, porcine blurts into our handke chiefs and a peevish suspicion that ou most vulnerable emotions are in the pro cess of being mugged.

The director is Jim Sheridan, wh proved, in "My Left Foot" and "In th Name of the Father," to be more tha capable of blocking his ears against th call of the sentimental. In those film he gave himself up to the scrutiny other people's existence, whereas on th occasion he is delving into his own. H and his family came to New York in th early nineteen-eighties, and the script credited to "Jim Sheridan, Naomi She idan, and Kirsten Sheridan"—one the more impressive group efforts sinc he demise of the Andrews sisters. Unfortunately, cinema being the devil's work, the ancient virtues of sincerity and ruthfulness are no guarantee of anyhing. Only the very toughest inspectors of intimacy can recount their own past without indulgence, daring to treat their alamities, or idle joys, as if they beonged to somebody else; hence the conrolled blaze of early Truffaut, or Fellini's I Vitelloni," or John Boorman's "Hope nd Glory."

Those are all sad affairs, not because he stories they tell are particularly glum ut because the fire of the past seems to e dying into ash. "In America," on the ther hand, comes across as hectoring ather than melancholy, precisely beause it strives to badger us with the sadness at its core. (There is a subplot about he family's black neighbor, Mateo—Djimon Hounsou—a painter who is dying of AIDS, but the less said about hat the better. Let us hope, at least, that he rattle we hear when Mateo peers out rom his doorway with maddened eyes was not meant to be as voodooish as it sounds.) As for Paddy Considine, his ohnny has an adorable smile, but the film equires him to dig deeper, stranding him n a desperately awkward scene where he sways, flails his arms, and cries that he is "a ghost" who can no longer feel. Much better is the street-fair sequence, where he wagers the family money, and hus their future, on slinging a ball hrough a hole and winning a furry oy. You can guess the outcome, and you an certainly believe that the parents, uzzing with the fun of it all, would ead home, fob the girls off with ice ream, and storm into bed.

Samantha Morton was made for uch times. Is there a more bewildering resence in modern movies? Has there een such a presence since Ingmar Bergman introduced us to Harriet Andersson n "Summer with Monika"? To begin with, those hard, elfin features don't match the bosomy fullness below—you on't know whether to read Morton as oluptuous or inwardly stricken, and, to eighten the confusion, she seems to ossess one less layer of skin than other ctresses, wincing and bruising at gesures that would slide off calmer flesh. In America" makes only fitful use of her rawness, although I am doomed to emember the brief summertime scene

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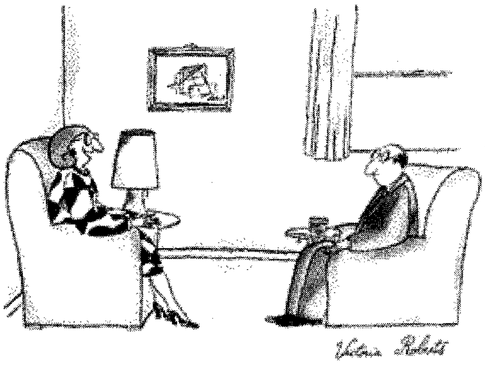

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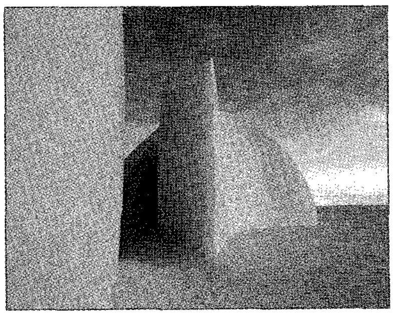

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in which Sarah sits and breathes heavily on the stairs, as if struck more by terror than by heat.

Morton may be too much of a child, in viewers' eyes, to be a credible mother, but that is a plus here, for it allows Sarah Bolger's Christy to assume the maternal role. Bolger was ten years old when the movie was shot, but she slices into the prevailing mood. "Are you O.K., little girl?" her father asks. "Don't little-girl me," she replies. "I've been carrying this family on my back for over a year." Throughout, she videotapes the rest of them on a handheld camcorder—something of a first for the early eighties, when any such devices were built more like ground-to-air rocket launchers. But then "In America" takes only halfhearted measures to root itself in a recognizable world. The family's arrival in the city is signalled by nothing more than a tourist-class jaunt through Times Square; we know that the girls attend Catholic school, but all that we see them do there is wear costumes for Halloween; and the ice-cream parlor to which they retreat is a pink-lit paradise called Heaven. In short, the Sheridan of "In America" wants us to pity his characters for the rough ride that they endure, yet at the same time he traps them inside a bubble of the picturesque and the outlandish. Even if you like this movie, you have to ask: What has it done to deserve its title?

The hero of the new French animated film "The Triplets of Belleville" is nameless, speechless, and unsmiling. If that sounds like fun, rest assured that almost everybody in the movie suffers from the same condition. Sylvain Chomet's fantasia showed this year at the Cannes Film Festival and has since chugged its way around the festival circuit, leaving audiences spooked and bemused; one reason for its international success may be that, where we expect dialogue, there is merely the lingua franca of noise—the clatter of trains, the rap of repeated gunfire, or the snouty wheeze of a dog.

The hero is first seen as a sickly, unappeasable boy, who lives with his grandmother. She is a wondrous beast, with a clubfoot and a pair of spectacles that she likes to poke back, with

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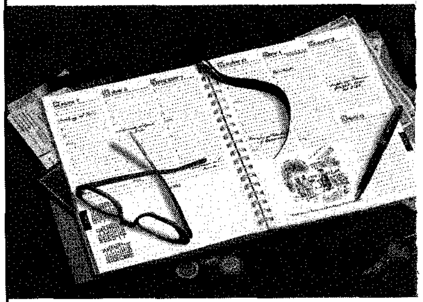

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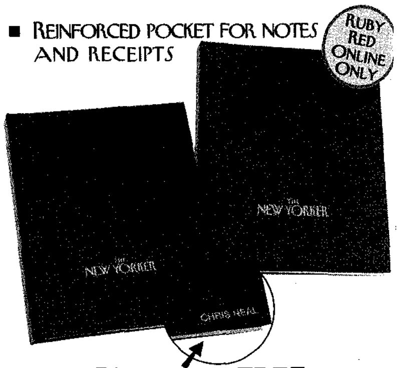

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click, to the bridge of her nose. It a minor tic, but it worms its way into our brain and cannot be dislodged. he kid is given a bicycle, and we hir forward to his adult self; he is ow a serious cyclist, and the grandma training him, in all weathers, for the our de France. When he finally competes, the poor fellow is kidnapped on mountain road and shipped across ocean to the fictional metropolis of elleville—pursued by the insuperable ld woman and her loyal mutt, a heavg sack of jowls and fur. Then things et *really* weird.

"The Triplets of Belleville" wants othing more than to be indescribable, a sk in which it succeeds. When I ll you that the triplets of the title are family of tenderhearted hags, who ress like faded flappers and dine off ogs that they flush from a murky pond y means of a delicately placed hand renade, you will gather that stark social alism is not on the menu. It is the iplets who help the grandmother to claim the errant cyclist, a quest that loses, as in a Mack Sennett movie, ith a blistering chase. The difference is at Sennett knew just how much farcil invention an audience could take, hereas Chomet seems so caught up in is own surreal conjurings that he could sily, if unchecked, allow them to fizz nd crackle on forever.

That said, the draftsmanship of his picture is as keen and clipped as pastry-cutting. When we first see the hero after years of cycle training, his body has puffed into a parody of the athletic freak, complete with hollow eyes, shrivelled waist, and immense drumsticks of muscle where you and I have calves. As for the heavies who try in vain to block the old lady's heroics, they are not humans but blocks of angled black, as if Chomet had distilled every gangster flick he had ever seen into a pure essence of hat and shoulder pad. Their vehicle of choice, incidentally, is a stretch Citroën 2CV, which may be the only answer to Franco-American relations.

To complain about "The Triplets of Belleville" may be churlish, for such an avalanche of oddness does not land on us every week, and you have to revere any director who, when faced with the need for a dream sequence, bestows it upon a slumbering dog. There are simplicities in Chomet's tale, however, that lag far behind the wildness of his eye. Belleville itself is an obvious parody of New York, right down to the hamburger joint, and the film cannot bring itself to break with the stolid European belief that the city is a hellhole, populated by none but the rapacious and the obese. Such is the hazard of the cartoon: as a form, it thrives on elongation and excess, yet, within its vortices and crannies, who knows what moldy prejudice can breed? ♦

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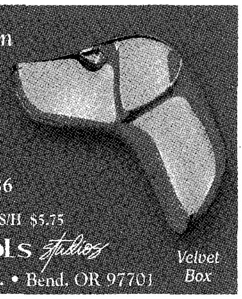

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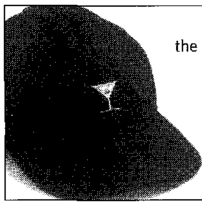

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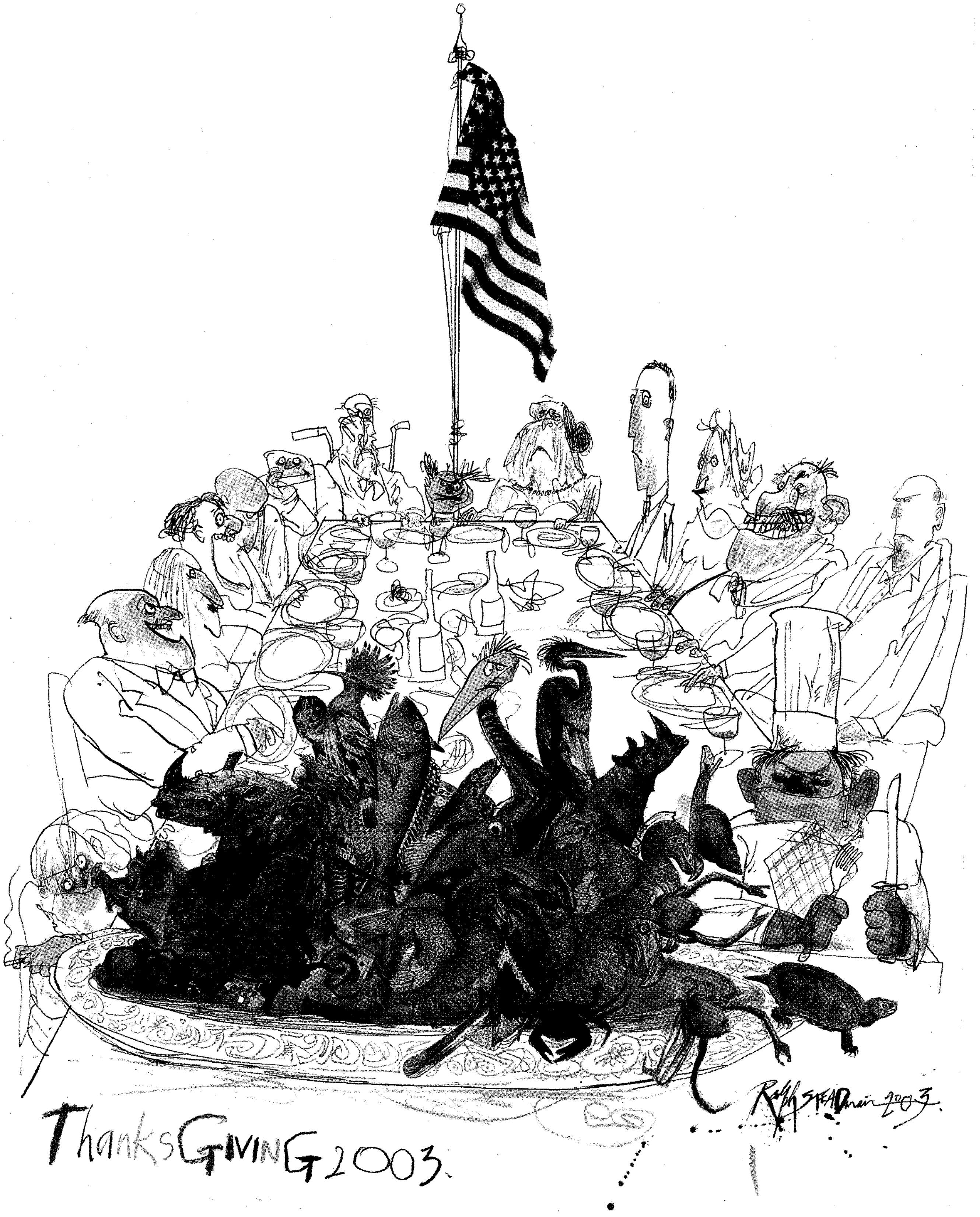
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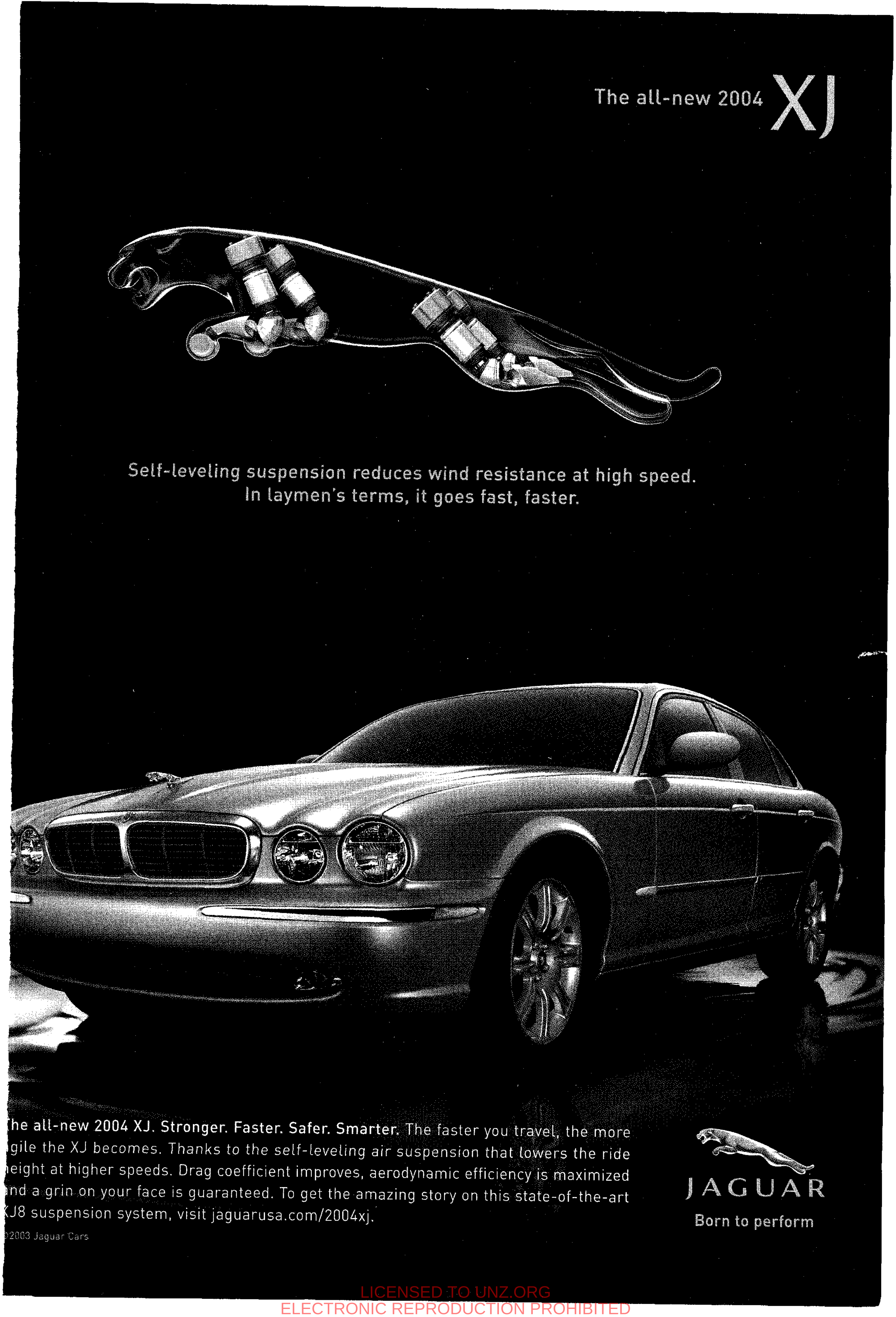

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